

# THE GOD WHO SPEAKS





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# THE GOD WHO SPEAKS

BY

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PROVOST OF THE QUEEN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD  
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## PREFACE

THE Warburton Lectures, founded in 1768, are given in the Chapel of Lincoln's Inn, one in each of the Law Terms; so the delivery of the course extends over a period of two years. The interval between the date of the first lecture and that of publication in book form allows time for development in the views of the lecturer. That has happened in this case, and has resulted in considerable amplification of the discourses originally delivered and some modification, including a change of title.

The aim and purpose of the book, as I now see it, is set out in the Prologue—to which I refer the reader.

Quotations from the Old Testament are from the Revised Version, which is here little, if at all, inferior to the Authorised in literary merit—except where the beauty of a rendering in the Prayer-Book Psalter seemed to demand its preference. The Gospels are usually quoted in the Authorised Version; the Epistles in the version which in any particular passage appeared to be the better.

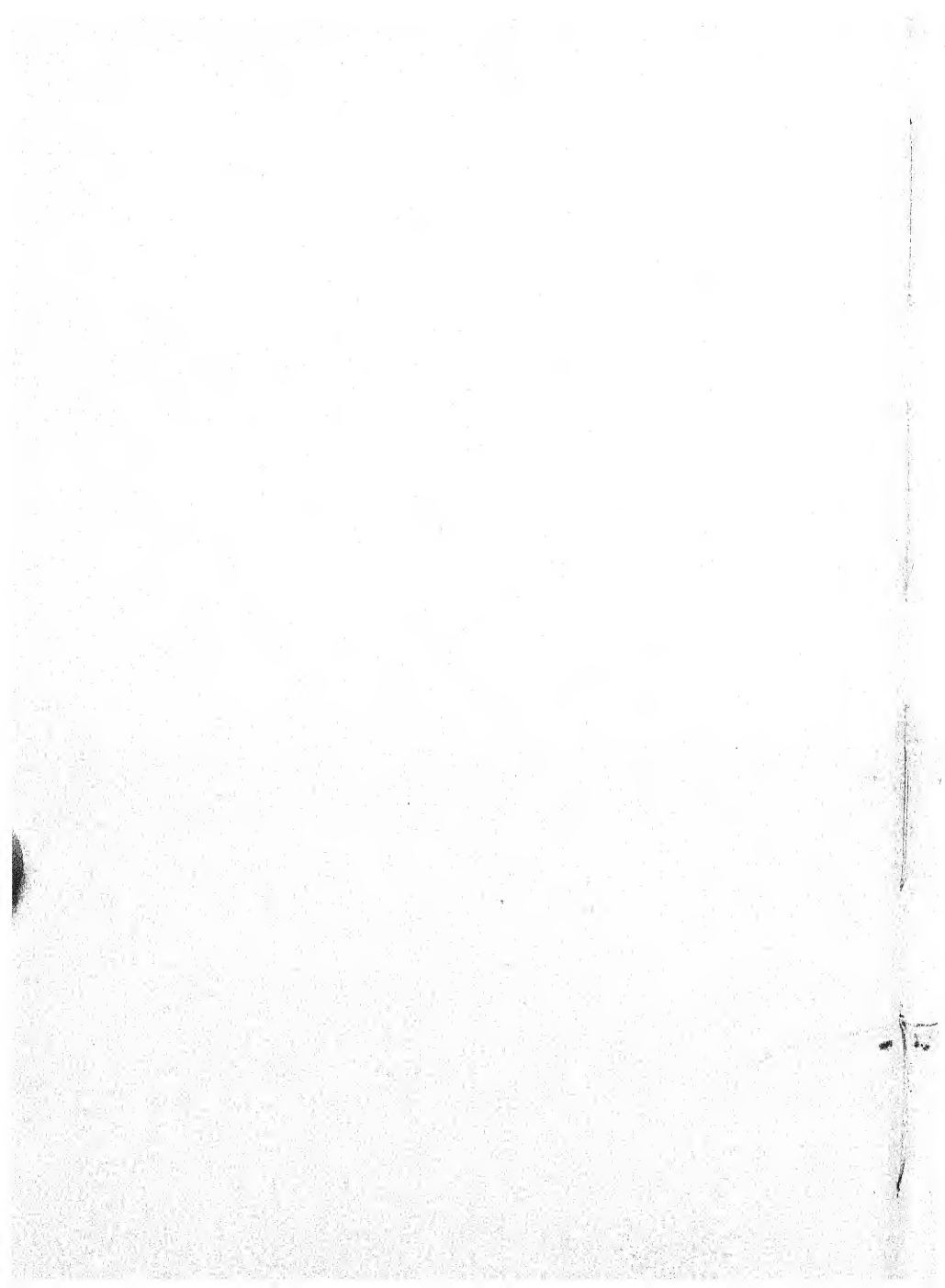
To Canon J. S. Bezzant of Liverpool, and Col. A. S. L. Farquharson of University College, Oxford, I must express my gratitude for careful reading of the proofs and for valuable suggestions made in the course of so doing. For the Index I am indebted to Mrs. C. W. Sowby.

B. H. STREETER

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## PROLOGUE

ONCE upon a time, the story goes, a country mouse was entangled by a town mouse in an argument to prove that there is no God. "But, dash it all," said the country mouse, "there must be a sort of a something." Quite apart from the Bible, great thinkers like Aristotle reached the belief in a great Unseen Reality to which could be given the name God. The question, however, whether, and (if so) how, we can derive from the Bible a knowledge of the character and will of God more definite and more profound than the human intellect unaided has so far been able to attain is of the first importance; for otherwise the word God is likely to degenerate into a name given to a "sort of a something", a vast vagueness—for some merely awful, for others benevolent but too hazy to affect practically the conduct of everyday life.

The exploration of the intellectual basis of religion—with special reference to the existence of God, the relation of religion and science, and the problems of pain and immortality—has since undergraduate days been a main preoccupation of my own mind. In the two books *Reality* and

*The Buddha and the Christ* I summed up the conclusions of my quest. The facts and considerations there adduced still seem to me important, and the conclusions drawn from them valid. But during the last two years I have come to see more clearly than before that certain limitations are inherent in any purely intellectual approach to problems of this kind.

The existence and character of God cannot be determined by the kind of reasoning by which we establish a historical fact or a scientific hypothesis. As fishes in the ocean, so are we in that all-embracing Reality in which "we live, and move, and have our being"; and life is an adjustment to that environment. This adjustment must begin long before our power of conscious reflection on it; and it must extend to depths of the personality which are commonly beyond the reach of such reflection. And only in proportion as there is in the seeker after truth a growing adjustment of the whole personality to that all-embracing ocean of Reality is his intellectual interpretation of it likely to be on right lines. Thus, if there is any reason at all for supposing that the "not-ourselves" is one "which makes for righteousness", it necessarily follows that the meaning of life will evade the search of anyone who, like Pontius Pilate, asks the question, What is truth? without the inten-

tion or the courage to face the moral demands of the immediate situation in the light of such truth as he already has. A sincere attempt to do the will of God will be a preliminary condition of "knowing of the teaching whether it is true". The way to a knowledge of God will be through a re-orientation of purpose and desire, and a constant re-dedication of the self to the highest that it knows.

If that be so, we should expect to find that, at a certain point of spiritual development, the personality will become sufficiently sensitive to the influence of the Divine to reach an awareness of God's will which may find expression through a voice within. It is a historical fact that the hearing of such a voice on certain occasions by certain individuals, for example the prophets of the Old Testament, has made epochs in human history. With more ordinary men and women, on more ordinary occasions, a similar awareness may express itself in the urge of conscience or the conviction of divine guidance in the affairs of daily life.

Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

It is the aim of these lectures to show reason for the belief that, provided always certain con-

ditions are fulfilled, this voice within ought to be regarded as an authentic communication from the Divine—dimmed, no doubt, and at times distorted by limitations in the mental and moral development of the individual and his age. The evidence for this contention is made progressively clearer by a historical study of that unique development of religion of which the Bible is our record, if this be taken in connection with, and illuminated by, certain phenomena exhibited in the lives of religious men through all the ages and in the present day.

The greatest need of mankind to-day—socially and individually—is a true sense of direction. Our world is like an Atlantic liner deprived of rudder, compass, sextant, charts, and wireless tackle, yet compelled to go full steam ahead. There is magnificence, comfort, pulsating power; but whither are we going? Does that depend solely on the accident of circumstance and the ever-changing balance of conflicting interests and ambitions? Or is there available for man, if he so will, guidance on his dark and dangerous course from some Wisdom higher than his own?

A study which may point the way to an answer to that question is one of more than academic interest.



# I

## GOD'S PLAN

### SYNOPSIS

#### COMMUNISM, PREDESTINATION, FATE

The quality of a religion which Communism has for its adherents is largely due to the doctrine of "dialectical materialism", which gives it a basis in cosmic theory.

In its psychological results, the distinction between "dialectical" and "mechanical" materialism is comparable to that between Predestination and Fate. Predestination was once to whole nations an inspiration to heroism and effort. This came out of its assertion of a divine plan of which the individual can become the conscious and willing instrument.

The modern world needs a re-affirmation, not exactly of the classical doctrine of Predestination, but of the conception of God's Plan.

Some remarks on Providence and evil; and on Nature and the Reign of Law.

#### FALLACIES OF THE IMAGINATION

Effective belief in a divine plan requires the mind to be freed from three "fallacies of the imagination". We must discard the notions (a) that God thinks only in terms of astronomic magnitudes; (b) that He cannot be concerned with trifles; (c) that God and His activities may only be named in vague and abstract terms.

Between God's plan and mine, there can be no compromise.

Surrender of the self to God is not a renunciation of liberty. Analogy of the orchestra.

### HOW KNOW THE PLAN?

The test of action; obedience the way of knowledge. Conscience; guidance; inspiration; grace; the climax in Christ.

### THE FUNCTION OF PRAYER

The Pagan and Hindu conceptions of Prayer contrasted with that taught by Christ.

The Lord's Prayer.

The mind attuned to the Divine.

# I

## GOD'S PLAN

### COMMUNISM, PREDESTINATION, FATE

To the materialist all things are determined; but nothing is planned. That is the explanation of a remarkable decision made, after a long and acute struggle between the philosophers of Moscow, by the Communist party. It was laid down that the Revolution must have a philosophy, and that this philosophy is *not* mechanical materialism, but *dialectical* materialism.

When I was informed of this, my first reaction was that natural to a common-sense Englishman: Well, if once you decide that there is no God and plump for materialism, what on earth does it matter whether your materialism is of the mechanical or dialectical brand?

Further reflection, however, shewed me I was wrong. It is precisely this doctrine of a dialectical, as distinguished from a mechanical, materialism that gives to Communism a basis in cosmic theory, and thus enables it to become, in

effect, a religion to millions of its adherents. Materialism asserts that nothing but matter is ultimately real and that all things are determined by the original constitution of matter. But if the evolution of matter is conceived of in purely mechanistic terms, the resultant process must be without plan, without purpose, and without direction; the Universe and all things in it are one gigantic accident. Dialectical materialism asserts the contrary. It asserts that the character of the Universe is such that all things, whether in inanimate nature or in the evolution of human history, move in accordance with a certain rhythm or law to which the name of "dialectic" is given. This dialectic rhythm is of such a nature that it necessarily results in progress—the conflict of opposites leading to a new and higher synthesis. Human history moves in accordance with this rhythm. It follows, therefore, that the individual by whose mind this law has been vitally apprehended can *co-operate with the cosmic process* and become a conscious instrument in the realisation of man's highest destiny. Such a doctrine, to those who hold it, is an inspiration to hope and to battle; it has for the Communist something of the quality felt by men of old when they sang *ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*. In Communist ideology the conception of dialectical materialism is

dynamic; by means of this it succeeds in making the denial of the existence of God into something like a positive religion. I quote from a recent pamphlet:

Dialectics [*sic*] not only points out to the proletariat its historical task, but it gives the proletariat the certainty of victory, it is to a certain extent *the guarantee of this victory*.<sup>1</sup>

When I first grasped the practical importance of the seemingly fine distinction between a mechanical and dialectical materialism, I fell to thinking on another such distinction which has had momentous consequences in history—the distinction between Fatalism and the doctrine of Predestination taught by Augustine and Calvin. Many years ago a Turkish gentleman was paying a call on a friend of mine, when a messenger arrived saying that his house was on fire; the Turk merely shrugged his shoulders and remarked, “Kismet!” Contrast with this the normal reaction to emergency in countries which have largely accepted the teaching of Calvin—Scotland, Holland, Switzerland, New England. But what, precisely, is the essential difference between belief in Predestination and belief in an all-determining Fate? Surely it is this: Predestina-

<sup>1</sup> L. Rudas, *Dialectical Materialism and Communism*, 3rd ed., p. 13. (Labour Monthly Pamphlets.)

tion includes the idea of purpose, it asserts the existence of a divine *plan* with which the individual may consciously and willingly co-operate; Fate insists on a necessity to which he can only bow. In principle this is the difference between dialectical and mechanical materialism.

For a hundred years and more after the death of Calvin belief in predestination was a power in Europe stronger even than is belief in dialectical materialism to-day. Its tremendous emphasis on the divine plan—which because it was God's plan must necessarily be good and must necessarily prevail—inspired all who believed themselves to be privileged by His call to be its conscious and willing instruments, with a courage and certainty of victory which could battle successfully against overwhelming odds.

Personally, I should much regret a revival of the belief in predestination in anything like the form in which it was taught by Augustine or by Calvin. But religion will not again be potent in the life of Europe until the belief is revitalised that God has a purpose and a plan—not only for the world, but for every individual in it, and for the minutest details in the life of every individual.

The weakening in modern times of the belief that God has a plan is largely the result of a decline in the belief that God exists at all. This in

turn has been due in the main to three things: the idea that Science can explain the Universe without the hypothesis of an intelligent creator; the greater urgency for the general mind of the problem of pain (in itself a sign of moral advance); and the acquiescence of the churches in a literal interpretation of traditional myths and symbols—especially in regard to the conception of a future life. On these questions I have pondered much; and I have printed not a little on such subjects as the historical origins of Christianity, the interrelation of science and religion, the problem of pain, and the concept of immortality. What I have written I believe to be intellectually sound; but that belief has not, I confess, given me complete immunity from the psychological effect of that corroding atmosphere of world-despair which has gradually invaded the human race as a result of the World War, and the years of progressive chaos which have followed.

Who of us, indeed, has not during the last few years felt the doubt whether there is any purpose at all in things; or, supposing there to be some purpose or some power to which a philosopher could assign the name of God, whether He or It is concerned in any detail with man's affairs? In such a mood the idea that God has a plan, for the working out of which a man may become the

willing instrument, comes to one like a flash of lightning in the dark. It gives an explanation of the chaos. There are, it is said, two thousand million inhabitants of this globe; so long as every one of these goes ahead on his or her own plan, or without any considered plan at all, is it surprising that the result is conflict and confusion? Rather, is it not remarkable that things are not worse confounded than they are? Could they go on at all unless there were some kind of directive influence which, partially at any rate, counterbalances the stupidities, the egoisms, and the iniquities of mankind—unless there were, in Shakespeare's phrase, "a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will"? To account for the existing degree of order, progress, and good without postulating some guiding power, is a harder thing than to explain the disharmony and evil on the contrary hypothesis. For theism the great difficulty is the problem of evil, for atheism it is the problem of good.

So far as the world of material things is concerned, the conception of a Divine Plan presents no difficulties. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork." It was the contemplation of *order* in Nature which first turned the minds of the Greek philosophers towards monotheism; and in the seventeenth



century this was fortified by the development of the scientific conception of the Reign of Law. In more recent times, the growing appreciation of the beauty of Nature has given increasing force to the aesthetic urge which feels that supreme beauty must somehow be the expression of an immanent Divine.

There are many, however, who regard the scientific conception of the Reign of Law as incompatible with belief in a divine ordering of Nature. This view is usually connected with the idea that science has proved consciousness to be merely an "epiphenomenon", and therefore free-will to be an illusion. In the history of human thought there are curious ironies. In the seventeenth century it was the freethinkers and scientific investigators who stressed the freedom of the will; the religious were concerned to preach predestination. To-day it is usually the atheist who proclaims that free-will is a phantasy, while the theologian seeks to defend it. On this I shall say more later.

### FALLACIES OF THE IMAGINATION

Granted, however, that God has a purpose or plan for the world, it must be a plan for a world of free individual souls. That means that it requires the

right response on the side of man. Such response demands, I suggest, two things: imagination and will. I stress imagination; for the belief that God has a plan for which no individual life, and nothing which affects that life, is insignificant, demands not only intelligence but an intelligent use of the imagination.

The imagination of many recoils before the facts of Astronomy. Against the background of the unthinkable distances and immensities of the physical universe the planet we inhabit is itself just a speck, indeed less than a speck. On this planet the individual is a speck upon a speck. Can we believe that the individual, his sufferings, and his doings, can matter in the slightest degree to the Power which produced and controls this vast immensity? But call in a microscope; through this we may contemplate a universe as infinitely minute as that which the telescope discloses to be correspondingly immense. The man of science does not regard the things shewn by the microscope as less important than those which the telescope reveals. Indeed, for the theory of the nature of matter, as well as for the practical applications of science in regard to disease, manufacture, and the like, the important things are the microscopic. Why should the reverse be true of God?

Again, there are some who tend to picture God as though He were like the Managing Director of a great firm with branches all over the world. The Managing Director can only give personal attention to big things; he cannot look into the minor grievances of an office-boy in a small shop in a remote country town. But why not? Because he is a man, and no man can have his eye on everything, everywhere, always, and all at once. God can. To affirm that God exists, what is this but to say that we believe that the Universe is not the product of blind chance but is controlled by purpose? It is a contradiction in terms to say that God exists but has no plan. And to say that His plan can only contemplate the big outline and not also minor detail, is to reduce His intelligence to the scale of ours. It follows from the very nature of God, if there be a God at all; that He differs from man precisely in the fact that He can give attention to everything, everywhere, always, and all at once.

On the other hand, there are those who are so apprehensive of applying anthropomorphic imagery to God that they shrink from anything like so definite a conception as is implied by the word "plan". To affirm that the Universe has purpose or meaning, or that "values are real", is, in effect (they are ready to admit), to say that

God exists; but they feel that any language used about God ought to be characterised by a certain vagueness. This is another fallacy of the imagination. All thought or language which man can use of God must be inadequate, we can think and speak of Him only in metaphor. But that does not mean that we should speak as if the divine intelligence has less precision, and the divine purpose less intensity, than ours. On the contrary, we ought to select those metaphors which are least inadequate, that is, those which suggest the fullest and most concrete meaning. That is why we ought to speak of God as "personal". We cannot ascribe to Him personality with the limitations that belong to it in human experience; but to speak of God as "impersonal" is to picture His activity as if it were a purposeless energy like an electric current or were like the purblind life-force in a plant or the sub-rational consciousness of an animal.

The carrying out of a plan or purpose depends on detail as much as on general design; it is only human limitations which so often make it impossible to attend to both. God, then, must have a plan—not only for the Universe or for this planet, but also for each nation, each city, every business, every family, every individual. It is not necessarily a static and wholly inelastic plan, as

the classical doctrine of Predestination would suggest; it may well be one which, like the plan of a general staff, is not only capable of, but is designed for, modification as the course of the battle develops. But we must affirm that the Divine Intelligence cannot be content with something less full of purpose and precision than what a human general or statesman would call a "plan".

### FREEDOM

Once we realise this, it becomes self-evident that the only sensible course for the individual is to ask what is God's plan for him, and then endeavour to carry out that plan. For if we can discern anything of God's plan for us, common sense demands that we give ourselves entirely to it. Just here human frailty suggests a compromise; we should all like to live partly in accordance with God's plan, partly in accord with our own. But this is a case where compromise is merely silly. In commerce or diplomacy it is often wise to seek some half-way house, to "split the difference", as we say, between two sums of money or two opposing views. It is unintelligent to try that course with God.

At first sight the suggestion that a man should make a complete surrender—I would prefer the

word dedication—of his will to God, sounds like an invitation to throw away that essential freedom and spontaneity which constitutes the fine essence of human personality. But this is yet another fallacy of the imagination. Admittedly, to make a complete surrender of one's will to any fellow human being is a renunciation of liberty; but God is not another human being. He is the all-pervading Reality; "in Him", as Paul says, "we live, and move, and have our being". And it is the testimony of great souls in the past, and present, who have tried the way of surrendering their will to Him that His "service is perfect freedom"<sup>1</sup> and that "in His will is our peace".

I do not propose to embark upon a discussion of the problem of free-will; the subject has been sufficiently debated—on earth, if not also (as we are told) in Hell.

Others apart sat on a hill retir'd,  
In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high  
Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate;  
Fixt fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute;  
And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.<sup>2</sup>

I will merely remark that the intellectual contradictions raised by such debate are more acute for the materialist, who must believe in deter-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Augustine's *Deus, quem nosse vivere, cui servire regnare est.*

<sup>2</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II. 557 ff.

minism, than they are for the theist who believes in providence. If matter alone is real, our sense of freedom must be illusion.<sup>1</sup> It is otherwise if behind the material there is a personal or supra-personal Being. In life as actually experienced examples may be found of a self-surrender which is at the same time the highest form of self-realisation. The members of an orchestra renounce nothing of their liberty when they take the lead from the conductor. Indeed, the greater the conductor the higher is the degree of spontaneity evoked by him; and the more completely each performer surrenders himself to the conductor's lead, the more completely does he realise, and know that he is realising, his own individual potentialities and powers. Hence the ovation sometimes given by an orchestra to its leader at the end of a great piece greatly rendered. A living experience like this affords an analogy which goes deeper than mere metaphor to that harmony between human and divine will which is a personal experience to religious men, but of which the nature necessarily eludes explanation in terms of abstract reasoning.

God being God, and His plan being my highest

<sup>1</sup> This statement is unaffected by the controversies as to the nature of causation which have risen over the "Principle of Indeterminacy" in sub-atomic physics.

good, it is not slavery but liberty to conform my will to His.

### HOW KNOW THE PLAN?

At this point someone will say, how am I to know God's plan? There is no need, I would reply, to know the whole of God's plan. All I need to know is His plan for *me*. Nor do I need to know the details of that plan for my whole future, or even for a year ahead. It is enough to know it day by day. Christ taught us to pray day by day for bread; why should it be otherwise with spiritual needs? It was not an infant in the intellectual or religious life who wrote the words:

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

But, it will be asked, how am I to know even this much? All of us, surely, have such knowledge in the negative sense. We all know at least one thing in our lives which is *not* right; and what is meant by wrong, or sin, except thought or action which is contrary to God's will, that is, to God's plan for us. Every one of us, then, knows of at least one thing in ourselves which is contrary to God's plan. Until and unless he has straightened out that wrong, it is profitless to ask what may be the next item in God's plan for him. If, however, we are ready to conform to



God's plan in this one respect in which we know it; if we are ready to confess and make restitution for the wrong of which we are aware, then experience shews that the "still small voice" of "the Beyond that is within" will tell us the next thing that God wishes us to do. It may be to right some other wrong; it may be to do some positive piece of service; it may be a "happy thought" in regard to some work or project; it may be an untried approach in some personal relationship; it may be a flash of insight into new truth. But so long as we decline to obey God where we do know His will, so long as we refuse to take the first step, it is unreasonable to expect God to shew us the next. Nor, if He did, would it do us any good.

God's plan assuredly aims at harmony, not chaos; and in human affairs self-centredness, dishonesty, rancour, and the like inevitably produce chaos. Knowledge of God's plan must, therefore, be ethically conditioned. Thus there is an inner coherence between the conception of God's plan and the two convictions—that conscience is "the voice of God", and that certain intuitions, which come to the individual with an imperative quality, may be interpreted as "divine guidance". Certainly, no individual can claim infallibility either for the dictates of his own con-

science or for his own conviction of guidance; to do that would be to disregard, not only the frailty of human nature and its capacity for self-deception, but also the limitation of the individual mind by the social environment in which it has been formed. Nevertheless, without some such communication—however limited by human infirmities—between the human and the divine, it is hard to see how God could direct and educate a world of free and conscious souls.

But for such direction and education something more is requisite. There must be some standard of reference, some criterion of value, whereby to check the vagaries of individual conscience or intuition, and also to provide a stimulus to progress sufficient to overcome the relativity of the moral insight of the individual, even at his best, to that of his time and race. It would seem, then, that it must also be part of God's plan to "raise up" from time to time individuals of exceptional insight, whose words or actions may serve to provide more ordinary persons both with a criterion of value and a stimulus to progress. In other words, there is an inner coherence between the belief that God has a plan for mankind and the fact of the emergence in history of the exceptional individuals to whom we give the name of "prophets". In my next lecture I shall discuss

the part played in the history of religion by the Prophets of the Old Testament. In this place I will only suggest that in the phenomenon of prophecy we find, in its highest and most intensified form, that conviction of direct communication between human and divine which appears also in the belief that conscience is the voice of God and that divine guidance is a possibility in normal experience.

The peculiar quality of this conviction in the case of the Hebrew prophet and its close relation to the conception of a divine plan for the individual and the world, may be illustrated by a quotation from Jeremiah:

Now the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid because of them: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth (Jer. i. 4-10).

But set as we are "in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our natures we cannot always stand upright", mere

knowledge of God's plan is not enough. We lack the will to act upon that knowledge, we lack the power. Here, too, the prophet has a vision: human nature can and will—by God's gracious touch—be changed.

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them (Ezek. xxxvi. 26-27).

The crucial question of the validity and the limitations of the inspiration claimed by the prophets must be postponed to subsequent lectures. For the present I am merely concerned to indicate that there is an organic interrelation between belief in a Divine Plan and the conceptions of conscience, guidance, inspiration, and what theologians call "grace".

Congruous with these conceptions—forming, indeed, a climax to them—is a belief about which something will be said in a later lecture. I mean the belief that the Divine Plan has involved a supreme self-revelation at an appointed moment in history—that once in time God was in man made manifest.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Some of the philosophical questions involved in this conception are discussed in my Essay "Finality in Religion" in *Adventure*, ed. by B. H. Streeter. (Macmillan, 1927.)

## THE FUNCTION OF PRAYER

There remains to consider the necessary inter relation between the idea of God's Plan and the view we entertain as to the nature and function of prayer. The views held on this subject may be roughly classified according as they approximate more or less to one or other of three clearly distinguishable types: the pagan, the Hindu mystical, and that implicit in the Lord's Prayer.

In primitive religion the distinction between prayer and magic is never clearly drawn. The magician is avowedly one who by his spells attempts to bend the supernatural to do his will; but prayer, if less aggressive than pure magic in its method and intention, is nevertheless primarily conceived as a means of inducing the gods to perform the will of man. There is a passage in Cicero's treatise *De Natura Deorum* which reveals the extent to which this conception prevailed even in highly educated circles in the ancient world:

All men are agreed on this, that we get from the gods external goods like vineyards, cornfields, olive-groves, rich crops and vintages, in fine all the good things of life; but no one ever reckoned virtue as obtained from a god. And properly so; for on account of our virtue we are

justly praised and in our virtue we legitimately glory; which would not be the case if we regarded this as a gift coming from a god and not from ourselves. If, however, some improvement occurs either in our position or our estate, or if some benefit accrues or some mischance is averted, then we offer thanks to the gods; and put nothing down to our credit. Did any one ever thank the gods because he was a good man, and not rather because he was rich or distinguished, or escaped a danger? And it is for such blessings that Jupiter is called "all-good" and "all-high"; not because he makes us just, temperate or wise, but because he gives us health and security, wealth and affluence.<sup>1</sup>

In the East popular religion has in general remained at this level. But in acute contrast is the aim of the Oriental mystic who, by ascetic discipline and endless meditation, accompanied by a clear recognition of the illusory character of the phenomenal world, endeavours to achieve self-identification with the ultimate One.

The conception implied in the Lord's Prayer is up to a point intermediate between these two extremes. It starts in heaven, but it comes down to earth; for the Hebrew held that it was God who made the world, and "God saw that it was good" The Lord's Prayer should be interpreted, not as a fixed form of words, but rather as an outline indicating a series of mental attitudes in which

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, iii. ch. 36, § 86-87.

God should be approached by man. Man, it teaches, should begin by lifting up the heart and mind to God in adoration: "Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed by Thy name". From a heart so uplifted there will naturally flow the desire that God's kingdom should come, that the will of such a Being—God's plan, I have called it—should be realised on earth. Then follows, in trustful mood, the mention before our heavenly Father of the individual's material and spiritual needs: bread, forgiveness, deliverance from trial and hurt.

Popular Christianity, however, has inclined to forget that Christ said:

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him (Mt. vi. 7-8).

It would seem, then, to accord well with Christ's teaching that, whenever possible, we should begin the day by attuning the soul to the contemplation of the Divine (by some act of aspiration, or by the reading of scripture or other noble words) and should then, before offering any petitions of personal needs, wait in silence—listening, if haply the inner voice should bring some guidance, some indication of the part in God's plan which the worshipper may be called upon to play that day.

Often to those who listen so there comes a thought or word, clear and definite, pointing to action. But if no such come, it matters little. The mind has been attuned to the divine, and therefore is the more likely to react aright to the situations, unexpected and unforeseen, which every day brings forth.



## II

# THUS SAITH THE LORD

### SYNOPSIS

#### CREATIVE VISION

Science, art, and religion are alike in their dependence on the creative vision of exceptional individuals. They differ in the importance attached to verification.

#### PROPHETS AND SEERS

Resemblances and differences between the prophets and seers of ancient Israel and similar claimants to supra-normal insight among other peoples.

The importance of Elijah in the history of religion.

#### AMOS TO ISAIAH

Modern historical study of the Bible has brought out more clearly the striking originality of the great prophets. These regenerated religion by making ethics central; whereas Confucius, the Buddha, and the early Greek thinkers despaired of religion and substituted philosophy.

The different starting points of the Hebrew Prophet and the Hindu Pundit.

The progressive enrichment of the conception of the divine character traceable in the writings of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah.

#### FURTHER HEIGHTS

This process is continued by Jeremiah, and reaches its climax in the anonymous prophet, commonly referred to as Second Isaiah or The Isaiah of the Exile (= Is. xl.-lv.).

Two further contrasts between Hebrew and Indian religion:

in regard (a) to their attitude towards metaphysics, (b) to the conception of God's Plan.

#### THE MESSIANIC HOPE

Two convictions: that the religion of Israel will become a world-religion; that history moves towards a glorious goal.

The Suffering Servant in Isaiah ch. liii.

#### WHENCE CAME THE MESSAGE?

Undoubtedly the Prophets believed that their message came to them from God.

Some reflections on this.

## II

### THUS SAITH THE LORD

#### CREATIVE VISION

WHENCE came to man the apprehension of a God who plans a Universe, yet without whom "not one sparrow falleth to the ground"—a God towards whom the lifting up of the heart taught us in the Lord's Prayer is the natural human approach? Such an apprehension is supra-rational; that is, it springs, not from unreason, but from an intuition which soars beyond and above anything that the intellect by any purely analytic operation can discern. It came, and comes, in a mode akin rather to the artist's vision than to the scientist's demonstration.

Yet there is resemblance as well as distinction between the way of science and the way of art. In science the flash of discovery, the first glimpse of an hypothesis, has close analogies to what in art and religion we speak of as inspiration. The advance of science demands something more and other than the power of accurate observation,

acute analysis, and logical demonstration; there must be also the synthetic imagination which leaps out to meet the facts observed with the creative insight which can detect in their multiplicity or confusion meaning and coherence. Some scientists possess, others lack, this faculty; the great discoverer, like the poet, is not made but born. Where science differs from art is in the importance it attaches to the testing of that which imagination has discerned. Elaborate verification may be required to prove a hypothesis right; but it is creative vision that provides the theory which reasoning has to test.<sup>1</sup> Religion also, inasmuch as it issues in action, is continually putting its hypothesis to the test of experiment.

O, taste and see that the Lord is good:

Blessed is the man that trusteth in him (Ps. xxxiv. 8).

But here the things to be done are not selected for the sake of verifying the hypothesis, but because they are held to be right.

## PROPHETS AND SEERS

In the field of religion the creative vision appears most conspicuously in a class of persons to

<sup>1</sup> The function, and the psychological conditions, of the flash of inspiration in science are elaborated, with illustrations from the circumstances of his own more notable discoveries, by the great mathe-

whom is given the name Prophet. But the implications of the title have differed widely at different times and places; and this is one of those cases in which for an intelligent account of a phenomenon it is as important to note differences as resemblances.

Outside the sphere of influence of Western rationalism, belief has been universal that prophets, seers, soothsayers, oracle-priests or priestesses, medicine-men, Shamans, and other uniquely endowed persons, have powers of supra-normal knowledge. In recent years the attempt has been made to subject such claims, and the phenomena connected with them, to scientific examination. The investigation is peculiarly difficult because of the frequent admixture of conscious imposture or unconscious self-deception with actual "gifts" which may be styled "mediumistic". In the endeavour to rationalise these gifts, the semi-psychological concept of "telepathy" has been invented. But to attribute phenomena to telepathy is by no means to explain them; it is merely to assert a belief that they are capable of explanation in scientific terms. If, however, there be latent in the human mind mysterious powers, it is

matician H. Poincaré in *Science et méthode* (English translation by F. Maitland). (Nelson.) See also Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life*, ch. iii. (Constable.)

antecedently probable that, when the individual has been at special pains to attune his personality to the Divine, such powers will function at a higher level, and will be in fact God-directed. That hypothesis, at any rate, would make it easier to account for some of the phenomena to be reviewed in this lecture.

Seers and soothsayers were a regular institution in ancient Israel. Thus Saul first resorted to Samuel as a seer who, on receipt of a reasonable fee, would use his gift of second sight to tell the whereabouts of certain asses which had gone astray.

Behold now [says Saul's servant], there is in this city a man of God, and he is a man that is held in honour; all that he saith cometh surely to pass: now let us go thither; peradventure he can tell us concerning our journey whereon we go. Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we? And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have in my hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way (1 Sam. ix. 6-8).

Ordinarily, it would seem, Samuel was ready, at the service of enquirers, to put his mediumistic gift of "second sight" to quite homely uses. What is significant, however, about him and his

career is that on occasion, in the name of the Lord, he stepped outside the province of a professional seer, and spoke and acted in a way which conditioned the future development of his people's history and therewith of their religion.

The distinction between the true prophet and the false, to which I shall return in a later lecture, is clearly recognised in the Old Testament.

Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, arrayed in their robes, in an open place at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron, and said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until they be consumed. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak thou good. And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak. . . . And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace (1 Kings xxii. 10-14, 17).

Usually, it would seem, a prophet among the Hebrews (like similar persons elsewhere, and like the Delphic oracle in Greece) waited for a question

to be put to him. But exceptionally, in periods of national crisis, a Deborah or a Samuel takes the initiative, and, speaking as by the authority of the Lord, names a Barak or a Saul to rally His people against the national enemy. Even more remarkable is the action of David's seer Nathan, who in the name of the Lord denounces to his face the reigning monarch for the offence—in a Rajah of those days the venial offence—of compassing the death of Uriah in order to possess himself of his wife. Here, too, the initiative is taken by the prophet; but it is exercised in the assertion of the divine determination to vindicate outraged justice.

These two features—initiative in the name of the Lord, and the emphatic association of the divine will with the demand for righteousness—are found in combination in the more famous prophets, Moses and Elijah. Most of the actual legislation in the Pentateuch appears to be later than the time of Moses; yet Moses would never have come to be venerated as the father of Hebrew law unless there had been some grounds for so regarding him (*cf.* p. 68 and p. 104f.). It is of interest to note that neither Moses nor Elijah appears to have been a professional soothsayer. Similarly, Amos, the earliest of the prophets whose deliverances were collected at the time and handed down in writing,



emphatically disclaims membership of any of the regular guilds of "sons of the prophets".

Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a dresser of sycamore trees: and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel (Amos vii. 14-15).

Evidently, from the standpoint of the guilds of soothsaying prophets, Amos was an amateur. It would seem that the same thing holds of all the other prophets whose written works appear in the Bible. A few of them were priests; but none were soothsayers. Accordingly, the relation of prophets like Amos to the soothsaying seers, whether of Israel or other nations, is comparable to the relation in the sphere of biology of a "sport" to a normal member of a species. If we say that the prophet has evolved out of the soothsayer, we must insist that it is a case of what has been styled "emergent evolution"; that is to say, there has come into existence a new kind. Men like Amos or Isaiah are related to the soothsaying prophets who stood before Ahab as the astronomer is to the astrologer or the scientific chemist to his precursor the alchemist.

Elijah (c. 870 B.C.) was the forerunner of the prophets whose works survive in writing. The

main significance of his career is that he awakened (or re-awakened) his people to the imperative, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me". It is easy to forget that outside the three religions which stand in the direct line of inheritance from Elijah—Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism—a precisely opposite attitude is everywhere assumed as axiomatic in popular religion. Very naturally; for wherever a number of supernatural beings powerful to injure or to aid are believed (or even half-believed) to exist, it is only common sense to take steps, as occasion arises, to placate any or all of them. That is why the stand made by Elijah for the principle that Jehovah will not tolerate any rival worship marks a turning-point in the history of religion, or—to phrase it in a way which I suggest is truer—in the unfolding of God's plan to men.

And, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an

earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice (1 Kings xix. 9-12).

In this tremendous scene are brought together, and then assessed, the titanic forces of Nature and the voice within. Both are of God; but God speaks to man, not in the tornado, the earthquake, or in the lightning-flash, but by the still small voice. And that voice bids to act.

In a different context, and against the background of a different world of thought, twenty-six centuries later a similar conviction was expressed in his own way by the philosopher Kant:<sup>1</sup>

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: *the starry heaven above, and the moral law within*. . . . The former view of a countless multitude of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an animal creature, which after it has been for some time provided with vital power, one knows not how, must again give back the matter of which it was formed to the planet it inhabits (a mere speck in the universe). The second, on the contrary, infinitely elevates my worth as an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the whole sensible world, at least so far as may be in-

<sup>1</sup> "Critique of Practical Reason", *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, T. K. Abbott, 3rd ed. p. 260. Cf. ed. Rosenkrantz u. Schubert, viii. p. 312.

ferred from the destination assigned to my existence by this law, a destination not restricted to conditions and limits of this life, but reaching into the infinite.

In India and Greece the purely intellectual quest for a principle of unity in the Universe led thinkers to conceive of the Eternal One, the Unchanging Being behind the change and variety of visible phenomena, the Absolute beyond the relativity of things. But this One is known only to the mystic and the philosopher; and access to Him or It is along the path of contemplation or metaphysical comprehension which only these can tread. Action belongs to the realm of the relative and the temporal; and in this realm the gods of popular mythology still reign—at any rate, the enlightened man does ill not to offer them the sacrifices and other dues prescribed by social usage and ancestral custom. But by Elijah the purely speculative question of One or many was not even raised. He probably took for granted the existence of Chemosh and Milcom, the gods of Moab and Ammon. He was concerned not with speculation but with action—not with what a man conceives but whom he is to obey. The monotheism—so far as it exists—of Greek and Hindu thinkers is of the intellect; to the Hebrew religion is predominantly of the will—the will directed to ends that God approves.

## AMOS TO ISAIAH

The work of Elijah prepared the way for the great advance by Amos and his younger contemporary Hosea (c. 760-745 B.C.), and of Isaiah and Micah who followed later in the same century.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies,—I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil: learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow (Is. i. 11-17).

The startling novelty of this teaching was a discovery resulting from the study of the Bible by modern historical methods. The originality and epoch-making character of these prophets could not be recognised so long as it was supposed that the religion of the Israelites was already, when

they entered Canaan, the lofty ethical monotheism of the first chapter of Genesis and the Book of Deuteronomy. Actually, it would seem, these books in their present form represent the final result achieved after many years of the religious movement of which the prophets were the advance guard. It is not disputed that from of old there had been in Israel a conception of the character of the national Deity, and of his demands on human conduct, somewhat higher than that prevalent among the neighbouring Semitic tribes; but with these prophets of the eighth century before Christ the gulf between the two conceptions becomes ocean-wide.

A passage in Micah points the contrast. The blood of rams, libations of oil, human sacrifice—that is what the average Semite was quite sure, what even the average Hebrew more than half thought, his God demanded.

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? (Micah vi. 6-7).

The response of Micah sums up the message of his three great predecessors:

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah vi. 8).

The originality of the reform movement inaugurated by Amos and Hosea becomes even more clear when we realise that they anticipated by some two hundred years the outbreak of a world-wide protest against the futilities and immoralities of what men then called religion. Confucius in China, the Buddha in India, Xenophanes in Ionia, simultaneously voice this protest each in his own characteristic way; but they agree in doing this, not in the name of religion, but of reason. In China, in India, and in the Greek world it was by philosophy that the trivialities and worse of contemporary religion were challenged; in Palestine—and that two centuries earlier—the challenge came from religion itself. On that challenge religion was reborn.

Amos and his immediate successors, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, made ethics central in religion; but it was still religion, and the ethics flowed from the religion. Confucius, on the other hand, made ethics, in effect if not in name, a *substitute* for religion; so did the Buddha, though his was a very different ethic; while the Greek Xenophanes was the spiritual great-grandfather of Voltaire.

Hindu philosophy has, in general, been dominated by a conception of the Absolute which compels it on intellectual grounds to affirm that the divine is non-moral. Morality belongs to the sphere of the relative and the temporal; it even varies from caste to caste. Again, the high gods of India are not only non-moral, they are actuated by motives and perform actions which in the case of men would be regarded as shameful; their legends are open to the criticism levelled by Xenophanes against those of the gods of Greece. Thus the Hebrew prophet and the Hindu pundit start from opposite ends. The prophet teaches above all that God is good, and that therefore to love and to do the good is the supreme service which man can pay to God. And the message of each prophet derives individual character from the quality of his apprehension of the character of God; for on that depends the meaning given to the concept "good".

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord (Jer. ix. 23-24).

Thus after Amos, for upwards of two centuries



there is a progressive enrichment in the message of successive prophets. By Amos the divine character is conceived mainly as stern incorruptible justice, shewn especially in God's attitude towards oppressors of the poor and helpless. In Hosea this conception is enriched by the proclamation of a tenderness which longs for the conversion and restoration of a people that had gone astray. By Isaiah the fundamentally ethical conception of the divine nature is seen to give a totally new meaning to the specifically religious concept of the "Holy". Heretofore the primary content of the word "holy" had been, in the Israelitish as in other religions, that of awesomeness or irrational taboo. In primitive religion the idea of "the holy" results from the reaction of the soul to a *mysterium tremendum fascinans*, to express which Rudolph Otto coins the word "numinous".

Its antecedent stage is "daemonic dread" (cf. the horror of Pan) with its queer perversion, a sort of abortive offshoot, the "dread of ghosts". It first begins to stir in the feeling of "something uncanny", "eerie", or "weird". It is this feeling which, emerging in the mind of primeval man, forms the starting-point for the entire religious development in history. . . . The noble religion of Moses marks the beginning of a process which from that point onward proceeds with ever-increasing momentum, by which "the numinous" is throughout

rationalised and moralised, *i.e.* charged with ethical import, until it becomes "the holy" in the fullest sense of the word. The culmination of the process is found in the Prophets and in the Gospels.<sup>1</sup>

In the vision which was to Isaiah his call to the prophetic task, he hears the song of the Seraphim:

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

This extorts from him the cry:

Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

The vision continues:

Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged (Is. vi. 3-7).

With this vision the conception of the Holy was, for the first time and for all time, lifted up from dread of irrational taboos to adoration of the morally sublime. In the highest act of Christian

<sup>1</sup> *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 15, 77. Elsewhere in his book, I may be allowed to remark, Prof. Otto seems inclined—in emphasis if not in theory—to try to put back the clock, and to invite us to undo some part of the work of the Prophets and the Gospels in this regard. The Christian concept of "The Holy" is discussed in an Appendix to my *The Buddha and the Christ*, p. 312 ff.

worship the *Gloria in excelsis* echoes the Seraph's song.

### FURTHER HEIGHTS

In primitive societies individuality is relatively undeveloped. The family or tribe is the unit of thought. and action—religious, political, even ethical—to an extent which a modern Englishman finds it hard to understand. Hence, the earlier prophets naturally think of the relation of God to man as primarily social. But action, whatever theories may be held of it, must be largely individual. The insistence, therefore, on the centrality of ethics to religion prepared the way for the recognition of religion as an individual as well as a social matter. It is in Jeremiah that this recognition becomes explicit. In his writings there appears in a developed form that attitude of man to God which we commonly speak of as “personal religion”. The advance in this respect made by Jeremiah on the message of his predecessors is seen in the contrast he draws between the covenant which God made with the nation when they came up out of Egypt, and the “new covenant” which is to be.

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write

it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more (Jer. xxxi. 33-34).

The utterances of the prophets were commonly quite short and were called for by some particular occasion. It is probable that some were for a time preserved only in the memory of their disciples; others were written down on palm leaves or other writing materials then used for short pieces. Their collection in book form was later. That is one reason why so much in the books of the Prophets as they now exist is difficult to understand. It is like reading a posthumous collection of letters, with only an occasional editorial note indicating the circumstances of writing, and unfortunately, rarely arranged in chronological order. It is evident also that in the classical period of Hebrew religion there were a number of prophets whose utterances were written down but whose names have been lost. In some cases indeed the names may never have been noted on the scrap of writing material to which they were first entrusted; to the Hebrew of that date what mattered primarily was that it was

"a word of the Lord", the name of the human instrument was less important. When collections of prophetic utterances were being compiled, it often happened that anonymous pieces were conjecturally assigned to famous names. The memory of a great man exercises a kind of centripetal attraction which leads to the ascription to him, on some principle of congruity, of floating anonymous sayings, poems, or anecdotes. Thus half a dozen anonymous plays are printed as Shakespeare's in the Third Folio. Among the Hebrews this tendency operated in the attribution of laws to Moses, of psalms to David, of proverbial wisdom to Solomon, and of prophecies to Isaiah.

One of these unnamed prophets stands out as the high peak of development in this epoch. "Second Isaiah", as it is convenient to call the author of Is. 40-55, writes as one of the exiles in Babylon. His date is approximately fixed; for he speaks of Cyrus, king of Persia, as one who, having already gained great victories, is destined shortly to overthrow Babylon and restore Jerusalem (Is. xlv. 27-xlv. 4; cf. xli. 1-3). Cyrus captured Babylon in 538 B.C.

This "Isaiah of the Exile" gathers up into one grand climax the gains of the prophets who came before him. Not only that, he is more completely

and consciously an absolute monotheist; he conceives God on a larger scale. This had to be. In Babylon, the capital of a world-empire, and the centre of an immemorial civilisation, things human would be seen in a different scale of proportion from that which they assumed to earlier prophets for whom the Rajah of a hill tribe in Palestine was a great monarch, and the Temple and Palace of Solomon were among the wonders of the world. The scale on which things divine were seen could not be less affected. In Babylon the worshipper of Jehovah must either think of Him as infinitely greater, or else as considerably less, than Marduk—the national deity of the world-power which had crushed Israel, before whose gilded colossus, towering in front of its mighty temple, the kings of Babylon bowed down in worship. The prophet has gazed at this colossus; contemptuously he asks:

To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? The graven image, a workman melted it, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth for it silver chains.

The real God is not like that.

Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants

thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: that bringeth princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity (Is. xl. 18-19, 21-23).

This proclamation of the transcendent majesty of God is accompanied by an insistence, which goes beyond Hosea's, on the divine tenderness:

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that give suck (Is. xl. 11).

And in his sense of religion as an inspiration and a stay to the individual, Second Isaiah goes beyond Jeremiah:

He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with the wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint (Is. xl. 29-31).

Hebrew religion, in striking contrast to Indian, is totally devoid of an interest in metaphysic. Yet a religious apprehension of God which, if it were intellectualised, could only be described as a synthesis of the philosophic conceptions of immanence and transcendence, is found in a passage penned either by this same prophet in later years or by a disciple. The God he worships

is beyond the stars, but also dwells in the heart of man.

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Is. lvii. 15).

There is another contrast between Hebrew religion and that of India, even at its best and greatest. The prophets teach an unconquerable hope, the Buddha a conquerable despair. Their hope derives from belief in divine purpose; the Hebrew is upheld by the conception of God's plan.

This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back? (Is. xiv. 26-27).

God's purpose may entail judgment; but its aim is restoration—and more than restoration. And those whom God has chosen to be instruments of His purpose may count on His support.

But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend; thou whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the corners thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee and not cast thee away; fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed,



for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that are incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they that strive with thee shall be as nothing, and shall perish (Is. xli. 8-11).

### THE MESSIANIC HOPE

Sometimes a prophet looks far beyond the limits of Israel. A passage in Zechariah, which is fortunately dated—the fourth year of Darius (= 518 B.C.)—is of special interest. Palestine was then an insignificant province of the world-empire of Persia; a few exiles had been allowed to return from Mesopotamia; but the impoverished struggling community had not yet rebuilt the ruined temple. Given this background, the forecast that some day the worship of the God of Israel would become a world religion is indeed remarkable:

Thus saith the Lord of hosts: It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come peoples, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to intreat the favour of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to intreat the favour of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts: In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, shall even

take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you (Zech. viii. 20-23).

The conviction that history moves towards a glorious goal, defined and over-ruled by God, is the burden of a series of marvellous poems to which the name "Messianic" has been given.<sup>1</sup> Some of these, it is probable, are among the anonymous pieces which have been swept into the collected works of prophets whose names we know. But though their dating and exact interpretation is a matter of dispute, their existence, and their frequency, make them of central importance in any estimate of the character of the religion of the prophets.

Sometimes—though more often not—these Messianic pieces speak of an ideal king to arise from the house of David :

And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. . . . And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. esp. Is. ii. 2-4 (=Mic. iv. 1-4); Is. xi.-xix. 23-25, xxxii. 1-8, xxxv.; Jer. xxiii. 5-8.

all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Is. xi. 1-2, 6, 9).

There is one poem which influenced profoundly the thought of the first generation of Christians and probably that of Christ himself. It limns out what we may call "a philosophy of martyrdom"—the inner principle of that self-offering for the work of God of which centuries later the life of the historic Jesus was to be the perfect expression.

He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. . . . Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many: and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Is. liii. 3-6, 10-12).

Jerusalem was in ruins; the daily sacrifice remained unoffered. Humiliation and suffering was the lot of any Jew in Babylon whose life was a continuous testimony in the surrounding paganism of faithful service to the Lord. Suddenly there comes to the prophet the understanding that this kind of life is the offering of the daily sacrifice—only lifted to a higher plane. Such service is always sacrifice; and when the service is absolute, the sacrifice is perfect. A vision of the worth of complete self-offering has flashed upon the prophet's mind. The artist, the poet, and the prophet are alike in this: in moments of high inspiration they are possessed by an exaltation, an intuition, an imagination which "bodies forth the forms of things unknown", and out of the immediate and the actual creates something which is the expression of an eternal insight, something which has depths of meaning of which they themselves are only dimly aware.

#### WHENCE CAME THE MESSAGE?

This drives us back upon the question, what ruling motive, what aspiration, what inspiration, lies behind this line of prophets? Whence did they derive their message?

Their own answer is not in doubt:

The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy? (Amos iii. 8).

The prophet's message is not something of his own discovery; he speaks what he has been commanded to speak. It is not some brilliant idea which will win fame for him who proclaims it, or will bring success to his country. Isaiah is told at the very beginning that his efforts will rather make things worse.

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed (Is. vi. 9-10).

There are learned persons who write books to prove that religion is a product of the "community mind", a means by which the tribe or people can induce the individual to conform to the interests of the group. There is a certain plausibility in this view. As an account of religious systems which rest on old tradition it is about as true and about as false as it would be to define Universities as places that exist in order to train people to pass examinations. As an account of the religion of the prophets it is merely ludicrous. The Hebrew prophets are not the spokesmen of tradition, they are the leaders in a

revolution. But the revolution they look for is not one which either expresses, or will satisfy, a popular demand. They would save men in spite of, and against, their own desire.

Jeremiah spends a lifetime of lonely struggle, enduring hatred, persecution, imprisonment, and constant peril of death—fighting always a losing battle against the spirit of the age. He bitterly bewails the stern compulsion which makes him the bearer of the Lord's message:

I am become a laughing-stock all the day, every one mocketh me. For as often as I speak, I cry out; I cry, Violence and spoil: because the word of the Lord is made a reproach unto me, and a derision, all the day. And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain (Jer. xx. 7b-9).

There are those who argue that religion is "a flight from reality", a means of escape from the necessity of facing up to the conflicts of actual life. That is true, for some religions of most of their adherents, for all religions of some of them. But to fit the case of the prophets a contrary theory is required.

But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are of an hard forehead and of a stiff heart. Behold,

I have made thy face hard against their faces, and thy forehead against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house (Ezek. iii. 7-9).

Ezekiel is told that his task will require, and that therefore there will be given to him, a more than human degree of courage and persistence. Religion to him is not that which calls to some far-off land of mystic dreams, or which beckons the life-weary (as in Freud's conception) to return to the deep peace of pre-natal slumber. It is at one and the same time a summons to battle and an arming for the fight.

God, so far as we can see, operates in accordance with large uniformities that we name the laws of Nature, which include the laws of human psychology so far as such exist.<sup>1</sup> Suppose, then, He does at times act in some special way upon the consciousness of any individual, we should expect this action, not to supersede, but to stimulate his highest powers, and to result in an enhancement of his profoundest insights. At such moments the individual might rise far above the level at which ordinarily either he or his con-

<sup>1</sup> Certain psychological analogies which throw light on the form of prophetic inspiration are discussed in the appendix, "Dream Psychology and the Mystic Vision", to my book *Reality*.

temporaries live and think. We should *not* expect him always or entirely to transcend the limiting conditions—historical, psychological, or even ethical—of his time, his race, or his personal idiosyncrasy. Indeed, the more the fact of such limitation is stressed, the more remarkable appear the heights to which at their best and greatest—and they are not always at their best and greatest—the Hebrew prophets soar. Like Paul, they would have admitted—rather they would have shouted it aloud—“We have this treasure in earthen vessels”. What is not disputable is that, whencesoever derived, the treasure is of exceeding great price. It is not unworthy of the high source from which, in their belief, it came.

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good.



### III

## THROUGH SONG AND STORY

### SYNOPSIS

The Bible is a library rather than a book; or rather two libraries, the relation of which to one another is itself a fact of great significance.

#### EPIC AND LAW

Points of resemblance and difference between the early literature of the Hebrews and that of other ancient peoples.

The Law of Moses.

#### ISRAEL AND JUDAH

Some turning-points in Hebrew history.

The Hebrew, Greek, and Assyrian accounts of the failure of Sennacherib to capture Jerusalem, 700 B.C.

Ancient and modern conceptions of history.

#### THE BABYLONIAN EXILE

The Babylonian Exile is an event as central for the comprehension of the Old Testament as is the Crucifixion for the comprehension of the New Testament.

It transformed the "remnant" who accepted the teaching of the prophet from a nation into a church.

The dawn of the conception of a world-religion.

#### AFTER THE PROPHETS

The autobiographical writing of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Job, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs; Ruth and Esther.

The Wise Men of Israel; Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Wisdom.

## DANIEL AND THE MACCABEES

Martyrdom for the faith.

Apocalyptic symbolism.

## THE TEMPLE HYMN-BOOK

The Psalter a collection of hymns, ancient as well as modern.

The basis in personal experience.

## THREE REFLECTIONS

(1) The value for religion of poetry and story as the best expressions of the soul's experience.

(2) Though the Old Testament embodies much early material, its dominant religious message is derived from the ethical monotheism of the great prophets. The old stories are retold in a setting derived from the more advanced religion.

(3) The outstanding impression left is that of the Divine Plan, involving a call, an education, and a promise—with the corresponding responsibility for right decision.

## ADDITIONAL NOTE

Analogies between Hebrew Law and the Common Law of England.

### III

## THROUGH SONG AND STORY

WE speak of the Bible as a book. It is a library, or rather two libraries—of which the smaller, known as the New Testament, is related to the larger, which we call the Old Testament, in a peculiar way. So peculiar is this relation that a study of it forces us to cross-examine the assumptions with which we start; it compels us to ask ourselves whether we are taking it for granted that the course of history is (and can be) no more than a series of events and their consequences mechanistically determined in the relation of cause and effect, or whether we think it has meaning and a goal. And supposing we are in doubt as to this decision between a mechanical or a teleological conception of history—in doubt, that is, whether or no there is such thing as God's plan—the facts are such as to make this a test case for that decision. The facts themselves oblige us to face the question of the truth or falsity of the saying ascribed to Christ:

Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets; I came not to destroy but to fulfil (Mt. v. 17).

The New Testament is the literary resultant of a religious renaissance—of which the social resultant was the emergence, throughout the Roman Empire, of local branches of the Christian Church. All the books of the New Testament, except 2 Peter, seem to have been produced within a period of sixty years. By contrast the Old Testament, which is more than three times as long as the New, represents a national literature, the composition of which was spread over upwards of a thousand years. From a purely literary standpoint the Old Testament and the Greek classics may be placed side by side, as together constituting the supreme legacy of the ancient world.<sup>1</sup>

### EPIC AND LAW

In most countries the earliest literary forms are the ballad and the hymn. There commonly follows the epic or saga, a long poem in which the exploits of deities and heroes are related, or which hands down in legendary form the tale of memorable exploits, tribal or individual, that have stirred the imagination of a people. Prose writing begins later—usually in codes of law and the bare chronicle of important events. Next come at-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. C. Sands, *Literary Genius of the Old Testament*. (Clarendon Press, 1924.)

tempts at historical writing, some form of drama, and experiments in philosophical reflection. In the field of literature which purports to give a narrative of events, there can usually be traced a gradual development from purely imaginative stories of the doings of the gods and the beginnings of all things until we reach the sober record of verifiable fact. Four roughly distinguishable stages in this development are marked by the four words, myth, legend, tradition, history; but no hard-and-fast line can be drawn between the stages which these words represent.

Bearing in mind these general characteristics of ancient literature, let us turn to the Old Testament. The Song of Deborah (Judg. v.), thought to be "the oldest extant monument of Hebrew literature",<sup>1</sup> is something between a ballad and a hymn. There is no reason to doubt that it is substantially the song of triumph sung by Deborah on the field of victory. Similar pieces are the Blessing of Jacob (Gen. xlix.); the Song of Balaam (Num. xxiii.-xxiv.), who, instead of cursing Israel, is compelled by the spirit of prophecy to foretell a glorious destiny; and the lament of David over the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. i. 17 ff.), one of the finest elegies in all literature. Familiar as they are, I quote its concluding lines:

<sup>1</sup> G. F. Moore, *Commentary on Judges*, p. 132.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:  
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:  
Thy love to me was wonderful,  
Passing the love of women.  
How are the mighty fallen,  
And the weapons of war perished!

In Hebrew the formal distinction between poetry and elevated prose is less marked than in most other languages; and for the Hebrew equivalent of the epic or national saga we must look to the ancient narratives embodied in the Book of Genesis and their continuation in the story of the Exodus and of the Conquest of Canaan. All these, though technically in prose, have the quality and ring of the epic style.

Genesis i. 1-ii. 4a is believed, on linguistic and other grounds, to be of later date than the section (ii. 4b-iv. 26) which immediately follows, and to have been composed during the exile of the Jews in Babylon. This paeon of Creation, which forms the grand prelude to the Bible-story, should be read, not as scientific description, but as a hymn of praise. Its poetic origin has been made evident by the discovery of Babylonian epics, graven on cuneiform tablets, composed in the formal style of poetry and relating the tales of Creation and of the Flood. It is a *Te Deum* by some unknown prophet, acclaiming the lofty monotheism learnt

from Second Isaiah in face of the polytheistic puerilities of the Babylonian myth; challenging the philosophic pessimism of Asia with his "God saw that it was good"; and, in an age brutal and contemptuous of human life, daring to affirm that in His own image God created man.

Between the Hebrew epic and those of other peoples there are analogies; there is also a difference still more notable. The early books of the Old Testament are essentially the epic of God's Plan. It is God who makes the world, who summons Abram to leave country and kin in order to carry out His plan, who raises up Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, who gives them a law and a covenant, who leads them through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Set side by side the opening words of Genesis, "In the beginning God . . ." and those of the *Iliad* of Homer:

Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος.

Considered as an epic theme, the moody spleen of Achilles Peleus' son is in startling contrast with the unfolding in creation of the supernal will of God.

From the purely literary point of view, as well as from the historical, it is to be regretted that in what we now read as the first six books of the

Old Testament the old epic story is intermixed with the corpus of Hebrew Law. Codes of ancient law, however much in advance of their age, make heavy reading except to experts; also the greater part of this legislation seems to be later than the time of Moses (*cf.* p. 36). The reason why, assuming that to be the case, it could in all good faith be ascribed to Moses, is explained in the Additional Note p. 104 f.

The book of Deuteronomy, however, is much more than a mere code. Especially in the opening chapters (i.-ix.) language and thought alike recall the teaching of Jeremiah. It is the book of the Old Testament most often quoted by Christ.

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thy house, and upon thy gates (Deut. vi. 4-9).

The eternal God is thy refuge

And underneath are the everlasting arms.

(Deut. xxxiii. 27.)



## ISRAEL AND JUDAH

The epic stage in Old Testament literature may be considered to end with the Conquest of Canaan. After that the tradition steadily rises in historical value; indeed, in the Second Book of Samuel we have an almost contemporary account of the reign of David. David, shortly before the year 1000 B.C., captured Jerusalem, the last great Canaanite stronghold. He made this his capital, and succeeded, where Saul had failed, in consolidating into something like a state what had heretofore been a loosely bound alliance of kindred tribes. The Temple at Jerusalem was built by his son Solomon, who dazzled contemporaries as much by his sagacity as by a regal magnificence hitherto unknown to the simple Israelite. On his death (c. 937 B.C.), however, the northern tribes revolted from the hegemony of the tribe of Judah to which David belonged, and a new kingdom was formed with Ephraim as the dominant tribe. The leader of the revolt, "Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin", became king.

This northern kingdom, with its new capital of Samaria, was much the larger, wealthier, and more progressive, and its claim to the national name of Israel was tacitly conceded by the southern kingdom of Judah, which remained

faithful to the house of David. Humanly speaking, the defection of the "Ten Tribes" was a disaster; but in the event it postponed the capture of Jerusalem by 135 years. The northern kingdom lay right across the route by which any power that holds Mesopotamia will naturally advance to attack Egypt; as soon, therefore, as Assyria was strong enough to try conclusions with the rival empire of Egypt, it was, for strategic reasons, bound to subjugate a nation that blocked that route. Samaria was taken in 721 B.C. by the Assyrians, and the "Ten Tribes" were decimated and deported. Jerusalem and its mountain principedom, being off the main line of communication, was not destroyed till 586—by which time Babylon had overthrown Assyria and become in turn the dominant power of western Asia.

For the history of religion those intervening years are all-important. Refugees of the northern tribes brought their literature—epic, historical, legal, and prophetic—to Judah. Much of it survives in the Old Testament intermixed with that of Judah. Judah becomes the inheritor of the hopes, the traditions, and the name of Israel. There followed the stamping-out of idolatry by Josiah (621 B.C.), and his insistence that Jerusalem was the one and only place in which it was lawful to offer sacrifice to Jehovah (2 Kings

xxii., xxiii.). This constituted a reformation the far-reaching consequences of which I shall recur to shortly. Jerusalem was captured by Nebuchadnezzar in 601 B.C., and again (after a rebellion), in 586 B.C., when the city, palace, and temple were destroyed. The best part of the population was deported to Babylonia. But by that date the teaching of the earlier prophets like Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah had had time to permeate the national mind to an extent that was just sufficient to make possible, by the work of Jeremiah and his successors, a transmutation of the disaster of the Babylonian exile into the occasion of a religious rebirth.

The historical books of the Old Testament are notable for the power of vivid story-telling. Matchless examples are the tale of David and Uriah's wife (2 Sam. xi.-xii.), or the description of the battle in the forest and the tidings of the death of Absalom (2 Sam. xviii.). Not less dramatically told are numerous incidents in the Books of Kings. Some of these are also of outstanding importance for the history of religion—notably the exploits of Elijah, of which something was said in the previous lecture (1 Kings xvii.-2 Kings ii.), and Hezekiah's defiance of the armies of Sennacherib in 701 B.C. (2 Kings xviii. 13-xix. 37):

Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my fathers have destroyed, Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivvah? And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord (2 Kings xix. 10-14).

Then a word of the Lord comes to the prophet Isaiah:

The virgin daughter of Zion hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel. . . . Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast a mount against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come unto this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake (2 Kings xix. 21b-22, 32-34).

It so happens that of the fulfilment of this

prophecy we have three independent accounts—the Assyrian, the Egyptian, and the Hebrew.

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when men arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses (2 Kings xix. 35).

In 2 Samuel xxiv. 15 f. “the angel of the Lord” is the agent of pestilence; so it is probable that the retreat of Sennacherib was the result of an outbreak of plague in his camp.

The Greek Herodotus, when sight-seeing in Egypt, was shown, probably at Memphis, in a temple of Hephaestus (= the Egyptian Ptah) a statue of a priest-king holding a mouse, and heard its legend. Sanacharibos, king of the Arabians and Assyrians, had marched to the frontiers of Egypt; the then king of Egypt, having quarrelled with the military caste, was unable to oppose him with trained troops, but in answer to his prayer the god sent field-mice, who devoured the quivers, bows, and handles of the shields of the enemy, so that being defenceless they fled with great slaughter.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Herodotus ii. 141. In Homer, *Iliad*, i. 39, Apollo the plague-sender is called *Σμυνθεύς*, which may be connected with *σμήνθος*=mouse. The ancients may have had some inkling of a connection between plague and the rat, one species of which is (through its fleas) the great carrier of the bubonic plague. The passage is discussed by F. Ll. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis*, p. 5 ff. (Oxford, 1900).

The official account of Sennacherib himself, engraved on a clay cylinder, has been recovered from the ruins of Nineveh. Like divers official accounts of military exploits of more recent date, it makes much of a number of small successes, but throws a veil of silence over checks received. The description of the conquest of Judah would sound a grand achievement to an Assyrian public which was unaware that this kingdom was a stretch of mountain land in area not half the size of Kent.

But as for Hezekiah of Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, forty-six of his strong cities, together with numberless fortresses and small towns in their neighbourhood, I invested and took by means of the battering of rams and the assault of scaling-ladders (? or siege-towers), the attack of the foot-soldiers, mines, bills, and axes. I brought out from the midst of them, and counted as spoil 200,150 persons, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep, without number. As for himself, I shut him up like a bird in a cage in his royal city of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

A masterpiece of "propaganda" is the transformation of the failure to take Jerusalem into a notable success by the happy phrase, "I shut him up like a bird in a cage". This was strictly true; but it was not what Sennacherib had meant to do.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. J. Ball, *Light from the East*, pp. 187 ff. (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1899.)

He wanted to catch the bird and be himself the master of its fortress cage. And he would have done so, had not the "word of the Lord", which came to Isaiah when all seemed hopeless, emboldened Hezekiah to resist, and had not the Assyrian army, in a way no man could have foreseen, suddenly collapsed.

In the ancient world, history was never conceived as the department of science which the nineteenth century, not altogether successfully, tried to make it. Thucydides took a first step in that direction; but he was a pioneer who had few followers in antiquity. The Books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings may be classed as history of that pre-scientific kind that we find in Herodotus or Livy. Chronicles is a later work mainly composed of extracts from Samuel and Kings, and contains little that is of independent value. What the Old Testament does provide is narrative material sufficiently reliable to be made the basis of history, in the modern sense of that word, from the time of David onwards. But to quarry out this material and, with the help of archaeology, to erect therewith an edifice of scientific theory, is a task for experts.

The ordinary reader, it should be insisted—and the expert too in his unofficial moments—will miss the point of the Old Testament so long

as he thinks first, or thinks mainly, of the technicalities of historiography. He will miss it as completely as would one who studied *Antony and Cleopatra* or the Histories of Shakespeare as textbooks of Roman or English history. What matters is the magic of language, the portraiture of character, the irony and pathos, the multi-form insights into human nature—in its weakness and its glory. One who so reads the Bible will find these—and something more. The writers, to use an old phrase, are “men of God”; the experience of life in the light of which they visualise their theme is always, though with a varying level of spiritual insight, shot through with religion.

The Bible should be read as an objectification of this kind of personal experience—whether dramatised as story, lyricised as psalm, or in prophecy become a thunderbolt.

### THE BABYLONIAN EXILE

The previous lecture sufficiently stressed the uniquely original character of the religious movement initiated by Amos, and carried on with continual enrichment by the prophets who succeeded him. But both the actual development of that movement, and the results which it has had on the religious history of mankind, were largely



conditioned by the occurrence of the colossal national disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem and the carrying away of the best part of the nation in captivity to Babylon. The Babylonian Exile is an event as central for the comprehension of the Old Testament as is the Crucifixion for that of the New Testament. Under the Romans crucifixion was an everyday method of execution; wholesale deportations of the population of conquered cities were an ordinary feature of Babylonian rule. The Crucifixion would not have been an event of historical importance apart from the personality and the teaching of Him who was crucified, and the subsequent interpretation of these by "prophets" like Paul and him we call St. John. Just so the Babylonian Exile would not have produced the results it did apart from the teaching of the prophets who preceded it, and of their successors who interpreted its significance. Indeed, apart from these, it would have had results precisely contrary; for the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity were a disaster so crushing that many of the fugitives regarded it as proof positive that the God of Israel was one who could not protect them from the offended dignity of other gods.

Then all the men which knew that their wives burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by,

a great assembly, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly perform every word that is gone forth out of our mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine (Jer. xlv. 15-18).

From the standpoint of contemporary Semitic religion there was no answer to this logic. Why then, we ask, did not all Jews draw this same conclusion? The reason is that from the time of Amos onwards prophet after prophet had proclaimed that, unless the nation listened to the God-given call to repentance and completely abandoned its evil ways, the Lord Himself would bring down upon it national catastrophe. The ordinary Semite held that his god, like his king, would readily take offence and avenge it cruelly, but in the last resort his worshippers were as necessary to a god as his subjects to a king. Amos taught the contrary:

You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities (Amos iii. 2).

A century and a half had elapsed between the teaching of Amos and the fall of Jerusalem. During that time the prophets had acquired a following, and had made no small impression upon the national mind. Again, the fall (in 721 B.C.) of Samaria, the capital of the Northern kingdom, was a striking fulfilment of the prophecies of Amos; it was a vindication of what at the time must have seemed the strange doctrine which he taught. With this object lesson to appeal to the party of the prophets had succeeded, with the support of Josiah, in carrying through a drastic reformation (621 B.C.). Idolatry and the immoral practices associated with certain Semitic cults were sternly put down, and a code of law (probably that contained in Deuteronomy), which emphasised just dealing and humane conduct in ordinary life, was promulgated (2 Kings xxii.-xxiii.). All reforms—especially if they are carried through by a minority in advance of their age—have to encounter sullen underground resistance, as well as a mass of indifference among the rank and file; the permanent effect of those of Josiah on the people as a whole was disappointing.

But here again the teaching of the prophets was

vindicated. They had said that when the judgment came, only a "remnant" would be spared. Actually, one main effect of the disaster of the Exile was to close the ranks of all who felt with the prophets that the judgment had not only been foretold but was also deserved. There would be an extensive falling-away on the part of those who (like the fugitives in Egypt quoted above) maintained that the state had prospered so long as they had served the queen of heaven and other such divinities; and all who were not whole-hearted in their sole devotion to Jehovah began again to serve other gods. And anyone whose monotheism was only half-hearted would soon cease, in Babylon, to desire to retain separate nationality; or, if he did so wish, he would cease to be tolerated by the ardent spirits who were convinced that the Exile itself was the penalty for such half-heartedness. In the result, the Jews, especially those in Babylon, became a community whose primary bond of unity was devotion to a peculiarly definite conception of religion; that is to say, they were on the way to becoming *no longer a nation but a church*.

In yet another way the part played by the prophets was all-important. It was they who turned the people from despair to confidence. Jeremiah writes to his countrymen in Babylon,

prophesying that after seventy years the exiles would return (Jer. xxix. 10; cf. xxv. 11-12). A little later Ezekiel has visions of a restored temple and its ordinances—an idealisation of the older system which would make it a better expression of an ethical monotheism. A generation later, Second Isaiah strives once more to revive their courage:

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; that she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins (Is. xl. 1-2).

Thus the exile had a vision and a hope. He might not himself return; but his children would. It was worth while, then, to develop a new system of moral and religious instruction, whereby should be trained up a generation which, once it had been restored to Palestine, would not again forfeit the favour and protection of Jehovah by disobedience to His revealed will.

In 538 B.C. Cyrus, the Persian conqueror of Babylon, put out an edict allowing Jews to return to Jerusalem. Not many availed themselves of the permission. Not till 520 B.C., at the exhortation of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, did the people begin to rebuild the Temple.

Except, however, for a short period after the

Maccabean revolt (167 B.C.) Jerusalem was never again the capital of an independent state. It was a provincial city, subject successively to the Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman Empires. But the monarchs who divided the empire of Alexander the Great encouraged Jews (from Babylon, Egypt, and from Palestine itself) to settle in the cities which they founded; and in the largest of these, Alexandria and Antioch, they seem to have formed about one-third of the population. Thus the majority of the nation, including most of the wealthiest and best educated, lived permanently outside Palestine. Accordingly the enforcement by Josiah of the law, which prohibited the offering of sacrifice elsewhere than in the Temple at Jerusalem, entailed consequences unforeseen by that reformer. As long as the Temple lay in ruins, the sacrifices altogether ceased; but even after it was rebuilt Jerusalem was so far distant from the actual dwelling-place of the majority of Jews that only on an occasional pilgrimage could they ever see the Temple. Theoretically, no doubt, the offering of the sacrifices of bulls and goats was still, as in other religions, the supreme act of worship. But Hosea had said:

I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings (Hos. vi. 6).

And in the practice of the synagogue the focus of divine worship became the meeting together for prayer, for the reading of the sacred books, for teaching and exhortation.

This was a totally new thing in the history of religion. Long before the Exile it had been written:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation (Exod. xix. 5-6a).

Yet this call of the nation to a religious vocation would have had small realisation in practice but for the travail of the Exile as illuminated by the teaching of the Prophets. To a few choice souls among these there came the recognition of the wider purpose in this divine election. Not for its own sake had Israel been chosen, but to be an instrument of the divine plan for the conversion of the world.

Yea, he saith, It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth (Is. xlix. 6).

The prophet's eye looks forward to a time when even those nations which in the past had been

conspicuous for their oppression of Israel will become the people of Jehovah:

In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth: for that the Lord of hosts hath blessed them, saying Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance (Is. xix. 24-25).

A striking passage in Zechariah to the same effect has been already quoted (p. 53 f.). In spite, however, of the teaching of these prophets, the subjugation rather than the conversion of the Gentiles was the thing that most Jews looked for. It was to reproach them for this attitude that the Book of Jonah was composed. The author himself never imagined that anybody would take it as a piece of history. It is a parable, an imaginative story, written in order to convey a moral lesson. The idea was perhaps suggested by the passage in which Jeremiah compares Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, to a monster which had devoured the Jewish people: "He has swallowed us up like a dragon . . . he has cast us out" (Jer. li. 34). In the parable Jonah, a prophet of olden times (his name is mentioned 2 Kings xiv. 25), stands for Israel, "the servant of the Lord" who, though charged by God with the task of carrying His religion to the heathen, continually refuses to obey. He is swallowed up by



the monster, *i.e.* the Exile, but God delivers him from complete destruction. He then consents to deliver the message, but only to the extent of preaching judgment and destruction as the penalty due for evil deeds. When, contrary to his expectation, Nineveh repents, he is sorely disappointed. In order to bring him to a more humane view, the Lord prepares a gourd under the shadow of which Jonah rests, protected from the sun. Next day the gourd is withered, and Jonah protests.

And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry even unto death. And the Lord said, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city; wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle? (Jonah iv. 9-11).

### AFTER THE PROPHETS

After the rebuilding of the Temple, under the leadership of Haggai and Zachariah, the part played by prophets becomes progressively less important. The religious education of Israel is carried on by literature of another type. In a brief survey of this literature it will be of interest

to note certain analogies between the works produced in this later period and the classics of other ancient peoples.

Large portions of Ezra and Nehemiah are comparable to writings by Xenophon and Caesar in that they are an account of great deeds by the men who did them. Nehemiah's description of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem (445 B.C.) is famous (Neh. iv.). Not less vivid is the story how, with that end in view, he gained from the Persian king the post of governor—using his position as the king's cup-bearer to crave a boon.

And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, when wine was before him, that I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. And the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid. And I said unto the king, Let the king live forever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it (Neh. ii. 1-5).

The Book of Job is a poetic drama comparable

—though the theme is grander—to the *Prometheus Vincit* of Aeschylus or the *Oedipus Coloneus* of Sophocles. For sheer poetic quality Job and parts of Second Isaiah are the masterpieces of Hebrew literature. The grand problem presented by a theistic interpretation of the Universe is to discover meaning or purpose in suffering, especially innocent suffering. The Book of Job is the most elaborately argued stage in a long debate which runs all through the Old Testament and is concluded in the New.<sup>1</sup>

Ecclesiastes is written in a very different key. It is a poetic soliloquy imaginatively put into the mouth of Solomon as one who had experienced all that rank, wealth, luxury, or intellectual gifts can bestow. With its reiterated cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity", it anticipates, alike in thought and in consummate literary style, the *Rubáiyát* of the Persian poet Omar Khayyám.

Poetry in another mood is found in the Song of Solomon. This is not, as the Christian Fathers supposed, an allegory of divine love; it is a lyrical expression of human love, probably a collection of songs sung at wedding festivals—the epithalamia of a clean and simple country

<sup>1</sup> I have traced the course of this debate in the chapter on "Pain" in *The Buddha and the Christ*, pp. 194-226. Some features in the Book of Job may have been suggested by a Babylonian work.

folk. For poetry in yet another mood we turn to the dirges in Lamentations (chs. i., ii., and iv.) bewailing the sorrows of Jerusalem, to which there are analogies in Babylonian literature. Other short pieces are the Book of Ruth—an idyll in prose—and Esther, which is a good story, but not of special interest for its religious character.

Shrewd sayings in the form of proverbs circulate in all countries and at all times; but if we seek analogies for the attachment of the authority of a classic to a collection of proverbs, we shall look, not to Greece or Rome, but rather to Egypt and the East. Hebrew literature is peculiarly rich in this *genre*. Besides the book of Proverbs, included in the Old Testament, there are in the Apocrypha two more books of a similar character—Ecclesiasticus, written by Jesus the son of Sirach and published by his grandson in 180 B.C., and a work of still later date, known as the Wisdom of Solomon.<sup>1</sup> These books are evidence that great souls were still learning; the creative age of Hebrew religion did not end with Malachi.

Ecclesiasticus is best known for the chapter

<sup>1</sup> The Apocrypha consists of books regarded by the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria and by the early Church—and still by the Roman and the Orthodox churches—as part of the Old Testament, but not included in the Hebrew canon. The Continental Reformers extruded them from the Old Testament; the Church of England took a middle course. It prescribes their occasional reading in public worship, “yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine”.

(xliv.) "Let us now praise famous men", a familiar lection at commemoration services; but the book contains much else that is both good and wise.

Reprove a friend; it may be he did it not:  
And if he did something, that he may do it no more.  
Reprove thy neighbour; it may be he said it not:  
And if he hath said it, that he may not say it again.  
Reprove a friend; for many times there is slander:  
And trust not every word.  
There is one that slippeth, and not from the heart:  
And who is he that hath not sinned with his tongue?  
(Ecclus. xix. 13-16.)

In one regard the writer almost anticipates the teaching of Christ:

Forgive thy neighbour the hurt that he hath done thee;  
And then thy sins shall be pardoned when thou prayest.  
Man cherisheth anger against man;  
And doth he seek healing from the Lord?  
Upon a man like himself he hath no mercy;  
And doth he make supplication for his own sins?  
(Ecclus. xxviii. 2-4.)

The Wisdom of Solomon, so called, is believed to have been composed not long before the Christian era. I quote a few lines from its finest section (ii. 1-iii. 9).

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,  
And no torment shall touch them.  
In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died;

And their departure was accounted to be their hurt,  
And their journeyings away from us to be their ruin:  
But they are in peace.  
For even if in the sight of men they be punished,  
Their hope is full of immortality;  
And having borne a little chastening, they shall receive  
great good;  
Because God made trial of them, and found them worthy  
of himself.  
As gold in the furnace he proved them,  
And as a whole burnt offering he accepted them.

In the discussions of the problem of evil in Job and of the vanity of human wishes in Ecclesiastes; in the great chapter on Wisdom, divine and human, in Proverbs (ch. viii.) and in the Wisdom of Solomon, we approach the threshold of philosophy. But that threshold is never crossed in the Old Testament. The fact is important, for it marks one of the more notable contrasts between the Hebrew and the Greek, and still more between the Bible and the sacred literatures of the Hindu or the Buddhist, in which philosophical speculation is so dominant an interest.

#### DANIEL AND THE MACCABEES

Another type of Hebrew literature, to which the analogies are eastern, is Apocalyptic. Points of contact exist between Jewish Apocalyptic both

with Zoroastrian speculation and with certain of the classics of Mahayana Buddhism, *e.g.* the Lotus and the Sukhavati sutras. The germs of Apocalyptic are found in the visions of Ezekiel; it attains a fully developed form in the latter half of Daniel.

Daniel is believed to be the latest book in the Old Testament, and in the Hebrew Bible it is not included among the Prophets. Its writing was occasioned by a national catastrophe. Antiochus Epiphanes, the representative of the line of Macedonian kings who obtained Syria as their share of the dominions of Alexander the Great, made a strenuous effort to wipe out the religion of the Jews. This was part of a general policy of uniting his dominions by the imposition on all of the somewhat decadent Greek culture of the period. In 168 B.C. he "builded an abomination of desolation upon the altar" in the Temple at Jerusalem, ordered swine's flesh to be offered in sacrifice, set up a statue of Zeus, seized and burnt copies of the Jewish sacred writings, and put to death any Jewish parents who circumcised their children, as well as those who performed the rite for them (1 Maccab. i. 41-64). Led by the family of Maccabees, the Jews revolted; and after years of desperate fighting succeeded in driving the Macedonians out of Palestine.

Daniel was written (probably 165 B.C.) to encourage the Jews to face martyrdom rather than renounce their religion. To that end the author retells stories handed down in tradition of the heroic conduct of a certain Daniel who had lived in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Rather than bow down and worship a "golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up", Daniel and his friends had preferred to be flung into a "burning fiery furnace". Again, rather than renounce his faith, Daniel had consented to be thrown into a den of lions. And the power of the Lord had sustained and vindicated Daniel.

In the latter part of the book (chs. vii.-xii.) instead of stories we have a series of visions of the kind known as apocalyptic; these, in obscure and often fantastic imagery, predict the downfall of the persecuting empire. They conclude with a prophecy in which occur for the first time in combination with one another the ideas of a Last Judgment and Resurrection.

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. . . . Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days (Dan. xii. 2-3, 12).



Obviously so long as Antiochus Epiphanes ruled in Palestine, a book like Daniel was "seditious literature", the possession of which by any Jew might be visited with torture or death. That, no doubt, is the main reason why the exhortation to face martyrdom is disguised as a story of heroic happenings of three hundred years ago; and it is one reason why the prophecies of the downfall of this Macedonian power are veiled in symbol.

I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, terrible and powerful, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things (Dan. vii. 7-8).

A Macedonian soldier or police agent who read this would have no notion that "the little horn" stood for Antiochus; he would regard the book as nonsense, but politically harmless. As the vision unfolds, its symbolism becomes grander:

I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit: his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was

fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgement was set, and the books were opened.

There follows a picture which was destined in future years to influence profoundly the thought of the New Testament (*cf.* p. 121):

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. vii. 9-10, 13-14).

### THE TEMPLE HYMN-BOOK

I have kept to the last the book of Psalms. This—the “hymn-book” of the Jewish Church—has exercised a greater influence on personal religion through the centuries than any other book in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Like all hymn-books, it has been made up from earlier collections and contains poems by many authors and of different dates; it includes hymns ancient as well as modern.

<sup>1</sup> *Cf.* R. F. Prothero, *The Psalms in Human Life*. (Nelson.)

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept: when we remembered thee, O Sion.

As for our harps, we hanged them up: upon the trees that are therein.

For they that led us away captive required of us then a song, and melody, in our heaviness: Sing us one of the songs of Sion.

How shall we sing the Lord's song: in a strange land?  
(Ps. cxxxvii. 1-4.)

Clearly such a psalm was written in Babylon; but it implies the existence of many earlier "Songs of Sion", which were also songs of the Lord, or hymns. It is probable that the Psalter includes some very ancient hymns revised in the spirit of the more developed religion of the prophets. On the other hand, a few may be as late as 150 B.C.

In all countries, in all ages, and for all religions hymns have been composed; but this collection is unique for the combination of poetic quality with religious insight and profundity of personal experience.

In a collection so large and of such varied origin, we are not surprised to find that a few psalms, and occasional verses in many psalms, fall conspicuously below the general level. But what is truly remarkable is that so large a proportion of them still remain, even after nineteen centuries of Christianity, among the supreme classics of devotion. Indeed, to most Christians

they are more familiar even than any part of the New Testament except the Gospels.

The Lord is my shepherd: therefore can I lack nothing.

He shall feed me in a green pasture: and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

He shall convert my soul: and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me (Ps. xxiii. 1-4).

Lines like these disclose the secret of their power. The man who could so write speaks that he doth know and testifies that he hath seen. He has walked in the valley of the shadow of death and has found that even there he need fear no evil, for God is near with rod and staff to comfort. Of this psalm, as perhaps of no other piece in the Old Testament, we could believe that it had been dictated by Christ himself.

### THREE REFLECTIONS

From this rapid review of a marvellous literature, three reflections arise.

First, it is remarkable how much of the Old Testament consists of poetry or of stories biographical in character imaginatively visualised and dramatically related. This is no accident.

Religion resembles science in that it purports to be an apprehension of truth; but it is an aspect of truth which must be apprehended qualitatively rather than quantitatively. Its concern is with quality of life—a life which emanates from the Divine, but in which man is capable of participating if only he will dispose mind and heart aright to receive what is freely offered him. The love of God to man, and the answering trust and adoration of man to God, are not things which can be weighed, measured, or represented in schematic form by the concepts with which science operates. If, therefore, truth in religion is to be conveyed from mind to mind, means must be found capable of conveying, in all its subtly diverse forms, the quality of a life intensely lived. This can only be done by well-told stories taken direct from life, and by what we call “art forms”, such as the myth, the parable, the drama, and the hymn.

People often ask the question, Is the Bible true?—meaning thereby, Are all its statements accurate in regard to dates, numbers, and other facts of a quasi-scientific character? This is to ask a question irrelevant to the real issue. The Bible is concerned with religion, and religion is concerned with life. We ought rather to ask, Is the Bible true to life—at its highest? That question is already half answered if we can reply, The Bible

is great literature. All great literature springs out of a profound experience of life. If we speak of a novel as "good fiction", we mean that its representation of personal experience is not fictitious. A story that is "true to life" is an authentic expression of a quality of living actually experienced—either by the writer or by persons to whose inner soul he has penetrated—which by the creative power of art he recreates in the mind of an understanding reader. And the life, of which the writers of the Old Testament knew from their own experience the quality, is one that aspires to live in tune with the Infinite Reality that we call God.

The practical value of the Bible for religion is enhanced by the fact that it originated in an age and in a *milieu* where the vividness of direct perception was unsophisticated, either by the hyperlogical thought-forms of philosophy, or by the schematisms of modern science. Against this, no doubt, must be set the fact, to which I have more than once called attention, that the writers were children of their own age, and thereby, in things moral and social—as well as historical or scientific—their vision is to some extent circumscribed. Something higher and better was demanded. In the next lecture we shall see how the New Testament answers that demand.

My second general reflection arises from the fact that more than half of the Old Testament was actually composed subsequently to the fall of Jerusalem, and that all the older writings included in it were collected, arranged and edited after that date. As a result the old stories and the remains of ancient law, in what are called the Books of Moses, are given in a setting which implies the high monotheism of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah. Again, the compilers of the historical books are concerned to interpret the early documents and traditions, which they incorporated, in the light of the teaching of the prophets that the Exile was a punishment for Israel's sins. Taken broadly, therefore, the Old Testament may be regarded as the literary deposit of the spiritual revolution inspired by the prophets. It represents the religion, neither of the twelve tribes who conquered Canaan, nor of the petty kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but of the "remnant" of the nation transformed into a church by the experience of the captivity as interpreted by the prophets.

An immense amount of attention has been devoted by scholars during the last hundred years to the attempt to separate out the earlier documents used from the work of the editors who carried out this process. A reconstruction of these

documents is to a large extent possible, because of the degree to which Hebrew editors were content to reproduce their sources verbatim. Since the older sources frequently date from before the period when the prophets affirmed their high ethical monotheism, many of the books of the Old Testament reveal to the eye of the scholar a mixture of higher and lower stages in religious development. Nevertheless, the total impression of the combined work is dominantly that of the higher stage. For the editors were themselves so deeply impregnated with the religious spirit of the prophets that they naturally and inevitably interpreted older documents in the light of the later and higher religion. Their editing was, in a real sense, an "inspired" editing, in that it always pointed to the nobler meaning. The conception of God, for example, left on the mind by the Book of Genesis is that of the transcendent Creator who in the beginning made heaven and earth. After the great exordium of the book, the ordinary reader simply does not notice the naive anthropomorphism implied in the earlier source which makes the Lord God "walk in the garden in the cool of the day". Again, in spite of occasional incidents which are survivals of a conception of God ethically more primitive, it is the conception which is presented in the exhortations of Deuter-



onomy which gives to the Pentateuch as a whole its ethical and religious tone.

The Christian Church early made it a maxim that the Old Testament was to be interpreted in the light of the New; just so, the editors and compilers of the Old Testament interpreted earlier documents in the light of the religion of the prophets. This way of reading the scriptures has lasted for practical and devotional purposes to our own times. How far, we ask, is it legitimate?

I would reply that, taken as a whole, it is a truer way of viewing the facts than is an exclusively critico-anthropological approach. Take, for example, the Song of Deborah, probably the earliest considerable document embodied in the Bible. The critico-anthropological view says: This is a ballad of triumph sung to a tribal war-god. Up to a point that description is correct; but only up to a point. Certain of the tribes are praised because they "jeopardied their lives unto the death", others are condemned

Because they came not to the help of the Lord,  
To the help of the Lord against the mighty.

(Judges v. 23.)

But what more can be asked of men than that they should jeopardy their lives unto the death, when summoned in the name of their religion

to the help of the Lord against the mighty? The religion of the prophets, still more the religion of Christ, is infinitely richer than the Song of Deborah in its conception of the nature of God; therefore it conceives differently both the tasks to which He summons men, and the methods by which His work is best accomplished. But Deborah's claim for absolute surrender to the service of the highest that one knows needs only to be re-set in the context of the circumstances of the modern world to be still a word of God to man. Deborah is the precursor of Isaiah, Isaiah the forerunner of Christ; the intervals between them are great, but the line of advance is one.

The third reflection which is suggested by our survey is this. Throughout the Old Testament the course of history is thought of as directed by the guiding hand of God, but in such a way that full room is allowed for freedom and moral responsibility on the part of man. The divine plan is not conceived as mechanically rigid, but as in some sort contingent on man's response.

It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin (Jer. xxxvi. 3).

The divine plan is seen as a high and consistent

purpose, a summons and an education of individuals and nation alike to be its instrument, a call to a fellowship in work between God and man. By the many there has been rejection of that call, by the few acceptance.

And the Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear (Jer. xxv. 4).

That rejection has brought disaster upon them and sorrow to God:

For he said, Surely, they are my people, children that will not deal falsely: so he was their saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and grieved his holy spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them (Is. lxiii. 8-10).

Nevertheless there still abides the promise, the call, and the responsibility for right decision:

Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in, behold, he cometh, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap. . . . For I the Lord

change not; therefore ye, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed (Malachi iii. 1-2, 6).

On God's unchangingness depends man's hope:

Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy saviour (Is. xliii. 1b-3a).

So again Zechariah (ix. 12):

Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope.

## ADDITIONAL NOTE TO LECTURE III

### HEBREW LAW

HEBREW law would appear to have developed in much the same way as the Common Law of England. This in practice is mainly what is called "Case-law". But Hebrew law is case-law with a difference.

Maine, in his *Ancient Law*, shows how in most primitive communities the king, in his judicial capacity, was prior to the law. He pronounced judgment *ex post facto* on the rightness or wrongness of certain actions, and in these decisions was believed to be guided by a supernatural spirit of right judgment which the Greeks called Themis. Such decisions established precedents; but the principles or rules which were implied in them did not become clear until after the decisions were made. On this view case-law is the oldest form of law. Now, whatever else may be disputed about the historic person Moses, it is certain that he was regarded as a divinely inspired prophet who performed also the functions of king and judge for the tribes which he led. Maine says little about the law of Moses; but if his general theory is valid, we should expect Hebrew law to begin with a number of cases decided by Moses—of course under divine guidance. That would explain why, to the ancient Hebrew, the concept of law is inextricably bound up with the formula, "The Lord said unto Moses".

Statute law only comes into existence in relatively advanced civilisations; but even so, the complexity of actual life is so great and unforeseeable possibilities are so numerous that no legislator can ever actually envisage all the possible cases which will come up for decision. Actually those that come into court are nearly always border-line cases, for the

obvious reason that it is rarely thought worth while to fight a case that falls clearly within the wording of the law. Thus most of the cases brought before the judge are in reality cases which the legislator did not foresee, and for which therefore, strictly speaking, he omitted to legislate. But to admit this would bring the administration of justice to an end; it is impracticable to go to the legislator and ask him to amend his law to deal with every combination of circumstances which he did not explicitly foresee. The court, therefore, must undertake to answer the question, What would the legislator have ruled if he had foreseen the exact circumstances? Judges do this by searching for an underlying principle, or scrutinising the actual or presumed intention of the legislator; but this means that the judge himself (no doubt within narrow restrictions) becomes a legislator; for if his decision is not challenged and becomes a precedent, that decision is in effect an *addition* to the existing law. Theoretically the judge does not make law, he merely declares what the law is; but there are occasions in which the borderline between these two processes is hard to trace. In such cases a body like the Supreme Court of the United States may declare that a certain measure is or is not "contrary to the Constitution", or an English judge may declare that a particular enclosure is or is not a public place "within the meaning of the Act". In an age when the law to be interpreted was conceived as a word spoken by the Lord to Moses, the question on which the judge would have to declare the law would be put in the form, Is or is not this particular case "within the meaning of" what the Lord said to Moses? Every such declaration, if generally accepted, would actually be an addition to the existing law; but it would still, quite naturally, be quoted under the formula, "The Lord said unto Moses".

## IV

# CHRIST AND HIS INTERPRETERS

## SYNOPSIS

### THE NEW TESTAMENT

In literature and art certain periods are recognised as "classical". In the history of religion the period covered by the New Testament is more than classical; it is unique.

Christianity was both a hark-back to the religion of the Prophets and a further advance. In our study of its beginnings we must consider not only the teaching of Jesus, but the classical interpretation by the Apostolic Age of his significance for religion.

### THE HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

Brief survey of the main documents which afford evidence for the life and teaching of Christ, and for the history of the Apostolic Age.

### JESUS THE CHRIST

The claim of Jesus to be Messiah.

The absolute quality in his teaching.

His summons to decision.

### THE SPIRIT AND THE SON OF MAN

The understanding of the New Testament requires (a) an appreciation of the meaning of the experience of Pentecost; (b) some estimate of the influence on early Christian thought of the type of literature known as Apocalyptic.

### THE APOSTLE PAUL

An attempt at a summary presentation of the central ideas of

Paul—the most original, the most varied, and the most difficult writer of the apostolic age.

#### THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

The first “systematic theologian”.

A master of the Alexandrian method of allegory in exegesis.

His view of the Law and of the sacrifice of Christ.

The Promises.

#### THE WRITINGS OF JOHN

The Gospel of John forms the climax of the interpretation of Christ in the Apostolic Age.

Its author a philosopher, a mystic, and a prophet—more especially a prophet, in the New Testament sense of that word.

His philosophy has, as it were, two poles. (1) The Word made Flesh, that is, God in man made manifest. (2) The Comforter, that is, the indwelling spirit, in whom he sees the main fulfilment of the Apocalyptic prophecies of Christ's return.

The main purpose of the Gospel is not biographical.

The first epistle of John; and (by another author) the book of Revelation.



#### IV

### CHRIST AND HIS INTERPRETERS

#### THE NEW TESTAMENT

IN science and mechanical invention there is continual progress, for the simple reason that here little men may begin at the point where the big men who preceded them left off. A schoolboy in the twentieth century can understand things which were a mystery to Galileo. In poetry and art the case is exactly the reverse. When someone proclaims a contemporary poet the superior of Homer, Dante, or Shakespeare, we simply laugh; and no one expects that posterity will rank the achievements of sculptors or architects of the present day as aesthetically superior to those of Phidias or of the mediaeval cathedral builders. In poetry and art there is development, there may even be enrichment, but there is no continuous progress. There appears rather to be a kind of ebb and flow in the level of attainment, so much so that certain epochs have acquired the title "classical" in that works then produced seem to

have a *ne plus ultra* quality and to represent the summit of human achievement in some particular genre.

In the sphere of religion this phenomenon is still more marked;<sup>1</sup> so much so that the word "classical" (I know no better) gravely understates the unique character of the epoch of which the New Testament is the literary expression. Even those who reject religion altogether must still recognise that in the New Testament it has expressed itself in unexampled perfection. Thus the very question, whether religion rests on a valid apprehension of reality, is one that cannot be decided without a preliminary study of this collection of literature.

The Jews at the time of Christ were living on the spiritual momentum of their mighty past. Primitive Hebrew law and ritual, we have seen, had been revised in the light of the teaching of the Prophets; but as time went on the conception of religion itself had gradually become more and more legalistic. Moreover, since the Law embodied in the Pentateuch was held to be a code delivered by the Lord Himself from Sinai, it could be no more revised. But the needs and circumstances of a living community are constantly changing, and law must somehow or

<sup>1</sup> See my essay "Finality in Religion" in *Adventure*. (Macmillan, 1927.)

other be adapted to these changes. In any community where law cannot readily be altered, this adaptation can only be effected by ingenious casuistry. Casuistry, therefore, became a main preoccupation of the Scribes and Pharisees, who, as the accredited exponents of the Law, came to be also the typical representatives of religion. Against this the teaching of Christ was a revolutionary protest, recalling men to the direct moral simplicity of the religion of the Prophets. It was far more; it was a grand advance from the position which Prophets and Psalmists had achieved.

We cannot, however, profitably consider the significance for history and religion of the life and personality of Christ apart from the classical interpretation of that significance by his earliest followers, and in particular by three men of the spiritual calibre of the great prophets—Paul and the authors of the Fourth Gospel and of the epistle to the Hebrews.

## THE HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

The facts about the life and teaching of Jesus are mainly to be sought in the three short biographies, bearing the names of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with which the New Testament opens. Mark and Matthew were probably written to be

read aloud in gatherings of the faithful and to provide materials for their instruction—Mark for the predominantly Gentile Church of Rome, Matthew for a Church (possibly that of Antioch, the capital of Syria) which largely consisted of converts from Judaism. Luke appears to have a different object. He has in view a reading public, consisting of educated Gentiles, not all of whom were convinced Christians. His Gospel is the first volume of a historical survey, designed to bring out the idea that, although Jewish in origin, Christianity is, in the divine intention and in its actual development, the one universal religion for all mankind. His second volume—which we name the Acts of the Apostles—is the story of the triumphant march of the new religion from Jerusalem, the capital of Judaism, to Rome, the capital of the world. It concludes with the two years' unhindered preaching of Paul in Rome, which was ended either by, or shortly before, the persecution inaugurated by the Emperor Nero in the year A.D. 64, of which the Roman historian Tacitus has left us a lurid account. More than half of the Acts is concerned with the missionary activities of Paul, and the New Testament includes a number of authentic epistles by him. Thus we have something like a "Life and Letters" of Paul, from which we can derive a vivid im-

pression of the remarkable career and the profoundly original personality of this Apostle. Fortunately also, the fact of his contact with persons such as Gallio, Felix, Festus, who are known to us from Greek or Roman sources, enables us to correlate the chronology of early Christianity with that of secular history. The date, for example, of Paul's first visit to Corinth (Acts xviii.) is approximately fixed by an inscription found at Delphi indicating that Gallio was proconsul (the office was rarely held for more than one year) in A.D. 52; during that visit of a year and a half Paul wrote the two letters to the Thessalonians which we still possess.

Christ, like Socrates, Mohammed, and the Buddha, did not commit his teaching to writing. But it is probable, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> that, like the Buddha, he did deliver certain summaries of teaching in a poetical form designed to make it easier for disciples to learn them by heart. Even in an English rendering much of his teaching preserves the flavour of poetry.

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the

<sup>1</sup> *Hibbert Journal*, October 1933; and *Modern Churchman*, October 1934.

field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore fret not, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Matt. vi. 28b-33).

It has been shewn by the late Prof. C. F. Burney<sup>1</sup> that much of the discourse of Jesus in the Gospels arranges itself in "parallelisms" of one or other of the distinctive types which recent research has revealed as the special characteristic of Hebrew poetry. Moreover, if the Greek is retranslated into Aramaic—the language, closely akin to Hebrew, which was spoken in Palestine at the time of Christ—a large proportion of the sayings exhibit also the standard rhythms of Hebrew poetry. Since the larger part of the writings of the Prophets are in form poetical, it would be natural for Jesus, who clearly has the mind of a poet, to express his own teaching in that form, and to repeat some of his poems sufficiently often to enable his followers to learn them by heart. Such a procedure would also be practical

<sup>1</sup> *The Poetry of Our Lord, An Examination of the Formal Elements of Hebrew Poetry in the Discourses of Jesus Christ.* (Clarendon Press, 1925.)

common sense; for only a minority of those whom he addressed could read or write. What is the use of teaching unless by methods which enable pupils to learn?

The prophecies of Mohammed were first collected by a nephew a few years after his death; some were found to have been written down, separately or in small collections, on palm leaves, slips of leather, or other materials used then for casual notes; others were preserved only in the memory of followers, but no piece was admitted to the Koran unless the memory of at least two persons tallied. Similarly, it is probable that for some time the "poems", parables and epigrammatic *obiter dicta* of Jesus circulated among his followers by word of mouth or on little leaflets. A preliminary collection of these—prefaced apparently by an account of the preaching of John the Baptist and of the Baptism and Temptation of Jesus—seems to have been made, and translated into Greek, at an early date. In its original form this collection—commonly spoken of by New Testament critics as "Q"—has perished, but most of its contents, it would appear, have been incorporated in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is a reasonable conjecture that the document "Q" was compiled by the apostle Matthew, and thus his name became attached to one of the Gospels in which it is incorporated.

Of the Gospels the earliest is that according to Mark; and there is virtual unanimity among scholars in holding that the greater part of the narrative, as distinct from discourse, in Matthew and Luke, was derived from Mark. Mark has very little of the *teaching* of Christ; but Matthew and Luke, in addition to the source Q from which both have drawn extensively, must each have had access to one or more collections of parables and sayings which were unknown to the other. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v.-vii.) includes many striking sayings not found in Luke; and Luke's Gospel is particularly rich in Parables, some of which, like the Prodigal Son, are among the most notably original and self-authenticating examples of the characteristic teaching of Jesus. Matthew and Luke, therefore, are our main sources for the teaching of Christ, Mark for the events of his life. The Gospel of Mark was probably written at Rome some time between the Neronian persecution, A.D. 64, and the Fall of Jerusalem, A.D. 70.<sup>1</sup> A tradition, which can be traced back to a contemporary of the author, says that it was based on stories told by the Apostle Peter in the course of his preaching. That everything in this Gospel comes direct from Peter is improbable, but a scrutiny of its contents suggests that there

<sup>1</sup> The Crucifixion is variously dated A.D. 29, 30, or 33.



is a substantial basis of truth in this tradition. The great majority of scholars date the Gospels of Matthew and Luke between A.D. 80 and A.D. 100.<sup>1</sup>

## JESUS THE CHRIST

Jesus, like the prophets, spoke with authority and not as the scribes—with a significant difference. For the words "Thus saith the Lord", he substitutes "I say unto you". He speaks not only as prophet but also as Messiah; that is, as holder of an office of absolute eminence. And he summons man to an absolute ideal.<sup>2</sup>

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. v. 43-48).

<sup>1</sup> For the grounds on which the above conclusions are held, I may refer the reader to my book *The Four Gospels*. (Macmillan.)

<sup>2</sup> For an aspect of Christ's teaching not touched on in this lecture, I may refer to my essay "Christ the Constructive Revolutionary" in *The Spirit*. (Macmillan, 1919.)

The title "Son of God"—which the first three Gospels represent him as accepting rather than asserting—may not, in the Jewish usage, mean more than Messiah; but, at the least, the Messiah held the highest conceivable of human offices. He was to be the king of kings whose coming is the culminating point in the dealings of God with man. But Jesus conceived the functions of the Messiah in a way that was as revolutionary as the ethic which he taught.

But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark x. 42-45).

Man, it has been said, makes his god in his own image; the greatness and goodness which we ascribe to God is conditioned by the ideal of what is really great and really good to which we can ourselves rise. To God may rightly be ascribed "majesty" and "righteousness"; but Jesus saw the tawdriness of what the kings of the Gentiles (and their valets) deem majestic, the narrowness and negativity of what even good men think righteous.

For him God is absolute love; that is why he speaks of Him as Father, not as King or Judge. And to the Old Testament title "Shepherd of Israel", he gives a new interpretation:

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (Luke xv. 4-7).

Christ made possible an attitude which we may call "friendship" between God and man; in a sense he brought God down from heaven to earth. And ever since there have been theologians who have tried to push Him back again. They have this excuse. One result of preaching the graciousness of God and His tenderness for the lost sheep is (as was already discovered in Paul's time), that some people incline to say, "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound"—or at least to act as if they thought so. These forget that Christ also said:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth

the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. vii. 21).

Entrance to that kingdom is by the narrow way of costly moral decision:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. vii. 14).

### THE SPIRIT AND THE SON OF MAN

The New Testament is comparable to an ellipse, which has two foci, rather than to a circle which centres round a single point. This fact is obscured to the ordinary reader by the sheer moral splendour of the Gospel portrait of the Christ. To understand the rise of Christianity we must fix our attention, not only on the personality and teaching of the historic Jesus, but also on the experience spoken of by his followers as the outpouring of the Spirit, which began on the day of Pentecost next following the Crucifixion. One result of this, as I shall show in my next lecture, was the conviction that the Spirit of God had again raised up prophets to speak directly to His people. Only against the background of this conviction can we understand the Epistles and other documents which together make up what we call the New Testament.

But this Spirit is spoken of—indifferently it would seem—as “the spirit of God”, “the spirit of Jesus”, or simply as “Christ” or “the Lord”. How was it possible for Jews, fanatically monotheistic in training and outlook, to feel and speak of Christ in such a way?

To the religious tradition of the Hebrew Prophets the idea of incarnation was wholly foreign. A Hindu holy man, who by philosophic knowledge and ascetic discipline has pierced the veil of *maya* and beheld the Absolute, can realise his identity with It, and say, “I am He”. In Hebrew thought man is never, as it were, a piece of God; though he may be a son. But traditional Jewish religion did provide a thought-mould into which could be fitted the conception of an individual having a relation both to God and man of a character absolutely unique. Beyond the concept of Messiah was that of a mysterious figure, the *Son of Man*, the outlines of which were first sketched (*cf.* p. 94) in Daniel’s vision.

The type of literature known as Apocalyptic<sup>1</sup> is best represented in the Old Testament by Daniel, in the New Testament by the Book of Revelation—evidently the work of an author other than that of the Fourth Gospel. During the

<sup>1</sup> For a convenient account of this literature see R. H. Charles (Home University Library), *Between the Old and the New Testament*.

last half-century there have been discovered—mainly in monasteries in out-of-the-way places—a series of writings of this type. With the aid of these fresh materials an historical method of interpreting the luxuriant and often bizarre symbolism of this literature has become possible. We can thus trace the development of conceptions like the Resurrection of the Body, Hell and Heaven as places of abode for disembodied souls, and the Last Judgment. The book of Enoch is evidence that, at any rate in some circles, the figure of “one like unto a Son of Man” coming with the clouds of heaven in Daniel’s vision was interpreted as a superhuman being destined to appear at the Great Day as God’s agent to judge the world.

Apocalyptic ideas had an immense influence in the early church. They find their most elaborate expression in Revelation; but they are prominent also in the earlier epistles of Paul, especially those to the Thessalonians, though in later life his interest in them seems gradually to have waned. In the Synoptic Gospels they are prominent in Matthew; and both by him and Mark sayings are ascribed to Jesus himself which imply that in his teaching also they were an essential element. In Luke these ideas are less conspicuous; and in the Fourth Gospel they are, in effect, interpreted as symbolic representations of spiritual verities.

It is beyond dispute that the early Church, after experiences which convinced the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead, pictured him as seated in heaven on the right hand of God; and expected him within the lifetime of those who heard him to return "in the clouds of heaven" as the Son of Man of the Apocalyptists' vision. What is disputed is, how far the early Christians were right in supposing that Jesus held such views as these about himself. The dispute turns largely on the question whether those sayings in the Gospels which imply that he did so are authentic, or whether they arose in the tradition from a reading back of the ideas of his followers into the mind of the Master.

The outstanding characteristic of the teaching of Jesus is the way in which it pierces at once through outward forms to inward meaning, through the letter to the spirit; almost every sentence of the Sermon on the Mount could be quoted in illustration of this. It would be strange, then, if this characteristic were less evident in his attitude towards traditional Apocalyptic ideas than in his attitude to the Law and the Prophets. We should antecedently expect that he would select the really vital religious and moral ideas which the Apocalyptists were trying to proclaim, but would discard, or sit very lightly

to, the external forms in which these were expressed. Jesus did not hesitate to take a maxim from the Law of Moses and proclaim, "It was said to them of old . . . but I say unto you . . ." If this was his approach to what the Jew regarded as the most sacred portion of the inspired Scriptures, is it likely that he would have shewn less freedom in regard to the ideas of a religious literature which was not regarded as canonical?

This antecedent probability is borne out by a critical study of the Apocalyptic sayings ascribed to him in the Gospels. In the series of documents Q, Mark, Matthew, there is traceable a progressive elaboration of sayings of this type in the direction of making them conform more and more closely to conventional Apocalyptic ideas.<sup>1</sup> If such a tendency could operate *after* the sayings had been reduced to writing, still more might it have done so while they were current in oral form.

I suggest, therefore, that Jesus accepted and reaffirmed certain of the great ideas—such as Judgment and Eternal Life—which were the fresh contribution made by apocalyptic to Jewish religion, but recognised the forms in which these ideas were expressed as in the main symbolical.

<sup>1</sup> For evidence of this see *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, p. 423 ff., ed. W. Sanday. (Clarendon Press.)



He defends, for example, against the Sadducees, the Apocalyptic doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body; but in affirming that the dead do rise, he insists that it is not with a body of flesh and blood, "they are as the angels in heaven". It is to be presumed, then, that in accepting as applicable to himself the Apocalyptic concept of the *Son of Man*, he did so with a similar consciousness of its symbolic character. This conclusion is further borne out by his definite denial of knowledge of the day or the hour of the coming of the Son of Man (Mark xiii. 32). The exact dating of the End was precisely the point in which the Apocalypticists—like their literal interpreters ever since—were most interested; Jesus affirmed ignorance of the time, it would be strange if he spoke with less reserve of detail in regard to its manner.

Jesus thought of himself as Messiah, that is, as the instrument of God's final redemption of His people; he seems also to have applied to himself the dramatic expression in Isaiah liii. of "the philosophy of martyrdom" in which the Ideal Servant of the Lord is seen to bring "ransom" to many by his sufferings and death and then to receive a final vindication (see above, p. 55). In absolute confidence that God would never either desert His chosen one or fail to accomplish His great plan, Jesus faced the moral certainty

that his last attempt to convert Jerusalem would end in failure and death. As all his sayings show, the concrete picture-thinking of the poet was more native to his mind than the conceptual abstractions of philosophy; and the vision of the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven was a symbol near to hand for a supra-human way in which could be accomplished both the vindication of himself and the fulfilment of God's plan. At any rate, it would seem that this is substantially the conclusion to which the mind of the writer of the Fourth Gospel had been led. For him (as I shall show later) the coming of the indwelling Spirit, whom he calls the Comforter, is the real—or at least the main—fulfilment of the expectation of Christ's Return.

Nevertheless, the unique moral grasp of the New Testament is in one way the result of the Apocalyptic vision. On this point I venture to quote some paragraphs which I printed nearly five and twenty years ago.

The summits of certain mountains are seen only at rare moments when, their cloud-cap rolled away, they stand out stark and clear. So in ordinary life ultimate values and eternal issues are normally obscured by minor duties, petty cares, and small ambitions; at the bedside of a dying man the cloud is often lifted. In virtue of the eschatological hope our Lord and His first disciples

found themselves standing, as it were, at the bedside of a dying world. Thus for a whole generation the cloud of lesser interests was rolled away, and ultimate values and eternal issues stood out before them stark and clear, as never before or since in the history of our race. The majority of men in all ages best serve their kind by a life of quiet duty, in the family, in their daily work, and in the support of certain definite and limited public and philanthropic causes. Such is the normal way of progress. But it has been well for humanity that during one great epoch the belief that the end of all was near turned the thoughts of the highest minds away from practical and local interests, even of the first importance, like the condition of slaves in Capernaum or the sanitation of Tarsus. . . .

But we have something more to learn from Apocalyptic. The conception of evolution has proved so illuminating in every department of thought that it has inevitably distracted men's attention from the fact that, in human history at any rate, the greatest advances are frequently *per saltum*. They occur in epochs or moments of crisis, as in the Apocalyptic parable of "the Day of the Lord". The Reformation, the French Revolution, or the rebirth of the Far East in our own time, are conspicuous examples, but in a measure this is no less true of nearly all considerable movements. Such crises, no doubt, are the result of causes which can to some extent be traced, and have been prepared for by a slow and gradual development. But in their realisation they are catastrophic, and take even the wisest by surprise. "As in the days of Noah they were eating and drinking and knew not until the flood came", so it has ever been at "the coming of the

Son of Man". In each such epoch we may see a partial Advent of the Christ, but is the Apocalyptic word amiss that Anti-Christ is also then abroad? Such times are times of tribulation, devastation, and demoralisation as well as of deliverance and advance.

And what is true in the history of the great world holds good no less commonly in the inner history of the microcosm of the individual soul—"in an hour when he knoweth not his Lord cometh".<sup>1</sup>

### THE APOSTLE PAUL

Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all date their mission from a vision or audition which came to them with the compulsive character of a divine call. The Apostle Paul had a similar experience, only in his case it was more than a call—it was a conversion. Amos was taken from following the flock; Paul heard the voice from heaven, "Why persecutest thou me?" when journeying to Damascus to stamp out Christianity there by force. This event is described three times in the Acts—twice in speeches of the Apostle. We may perhaps infer that Paul, like others who have had a sudden conversion, was in the habit of recounting its circumstances as a means of helping others to a similar experience. In an allusion to it in

<sup>1</sup> *Foundations*, essay "The Historic Christ", pp. 119-120, 120-121. (Macmillan, 1912.)

one of his letters, there is an echo, obviously intentional, of the call of Jeremiah.

I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and made havock of it: and I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of mine own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the nations [=Gentiles]. . . . (Gal. i. 11-16).

That Paul here makes claim to a prophetic mandate is evident on a comparison with the words of Jeremiah:

Now the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations (Jer. i. 4-5).

But whereas to Jeremiah his authentication is "The word of the Lord came unto me", for Paul it is that his message came not from man but "through revelation of Jesus Christ". There is

another difference, that implicit in the notable phrase "to reveal his Son in me". Its meaning is more clearly brought out in a passage which occurs a little later in the same epistle:

I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me (Gal. ii. 20).

Paul has undergone a revolutionary internal change, which he explains as the result of the indwelling of a living spirit—divine and identical with the risen Jesus. It is this that gives meaning to his insistence that man is "justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law" (Gal. ii. 16). In this context the words "faith" and "justify" are not used in their ordinary and familiar sense. What Paul knew was a glorious liberation from the oppression of guilt and fear, from bitterness and inward conflict; and along with this an enhancement of vitality which was a new thing in recorded human experience. No words were in existence capable of giving it expression; he could do that only by forcing the meaning of such words as he found to hand. And a practical issue was at stake, which compelled him to state Christianity as the antithesis to a religion of commanded "works". For a section

of the Church wished to compel Gentile converts to obey the Law of Moses and submit to circumcision—a requirement which Paul saw would have completely wrecked the mission to the Gentiles which was his special call.

Upheld by intense inward experience, Paul seems to have felt no need to think out an intellectually water-tight philosophical theory of the relation of Christ to the supreme and only God. Christ is the “power of God”; he is also the “portrait” of God.

The god of this world [*i.e.* the personified principle of Evil] hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them. . . . Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. iv. 3-6).

In a later epistle this is developed by reference to a concept already found in Philo of Alexandria that the world had been created by a being in some way separable from, though emanating from, the Ultimate Deity.

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities

or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist (Col. i. 15-17).

The power of God that works through Christ is made effective primarily by the Cross—in two quite different ways:

(1) To Paul, the word Law stands for a purely legalistic religion. In the logic of this view, God is King; therefore, in the primitive conception of kingship, He is entitled to command and properly manifests His wrath at the slightest disobedience. God is also Judge—in accordance with the primitive conception of justice which sees it as vengeance limited by the principle of an equipollency between penalty and guilt. On such a view right conduct will consist in meticulous obedience to a set of commandments (however obsolete, irrational, or trivial) simply because they are commanded; and the motives for such obedience are hope of reward and fear of consequences. But since all men have sinned and broken the commandment, the whole world is under condemnation before the wrath of God.

How far the above is a fair account of the religion of the average Pharisee of the period is open to question; it is a strictly fair summary of the "slave-religion" from which Paul felt that he had himself been liberated by the act of Christ.



For Paul to become a Christian meant to pass from the status of slave to that of son.

But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that thou art no longer a bond-servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. iv. 4-7).

The act of Christ which effected this liberation was his death upon the cross, by which he took upon himself the curse or condemnation which the law pronounces on all who break it.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one which continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them. Now that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, is evident. . . . Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree (Gal. iii. 10, 13).

The Law had been given with a purpose, to coerce men to realise their need, and so prepare them for the religion of "faith" in Christ; it was like the attendant who (in the Greek custom) escorted the reluctant boy to school. But now that this purpose has been achieved the Law is no more required (Gal. iii. 23-26).

Few Christians, before Luther, seem to have had any idea of the exuberance of meaning which Paul compressed into the word "faith"; and it is still debated what exactly Paul meant when he applied to the death of Christ language appropriate to the Temple sacrifices—or whether what he did mean is valid for this modern age. But his contention that the Law was intended by God to last only until the appearance of the Messiah, and was annulled at and by the Messiah's death, freed the Church for all time from the burden of observance of the Hebrew code, and made Christianity potentially a religion for all mankind.

(2) The Cross of Christ was for Paul the annulment, not merely of the Jewish Law, but also of the philosophy of the Greek. The point is one that is often missed. In the ethical systems of Aristotle or the Stoics, as in that of Confucius, dignity is fundamental; the ideal aim is to be self-sufficient, *sans peur et sans reproche*; it was an ethic of pride. Paul had inherited a double pride—the racial and religious pride of the Jew and the social and civic pride of the Roman. Paul was a Roman citizen, not in Rome where such were common, but in the provinces; he was a *sahib*. In addition, he inherited as a Jew the contempt of his race for pagan breeds which knew not the law. No Roman could be crucified, it was the

slave's death. In an age callous to human suffering the connotation of the word "cross" was disgrace even more than pain.<sup>1</sup> To hail as king a crucified Messiah, and to be an outcast from his own race among the kind of people who could so behave, was to Paul—whether as Roman or as Jew—the supreme humiliation. But the cross was God's way; and it was Paul's own experience that the complete acceptance of this humiliation was the gateway to that liberation for which before he had longed in vain, and to an access of power for which he had never even hoped.

The word of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness; but unto us which are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
And the prudence of the prudent will I reject.

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe. Seeing that Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumblingblock, and unto Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wis-

<sup>1</sup> The author of Hebrews shares this view. Cf. "endured the cross, despising shame" (Heb. xii. 2); "let us therefore go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Heb. xiii. 13).

dom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor. i. 18-25).

To appreciate the ethical originality of Paul, one must set side by side Aristotle's description of the character and the demeanour of the ideal man,<sup>1</sup> with his self-conscious self-sufficiency, and the autobiographical passage in which, against certain detractors, Paul vindicates himself and his career (2 Cor. xi. 21-xii. 10). I quote the last few verses:

Wherefore, that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch. Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weaknesses. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weakness, that the strength of Christ may rest upon me. Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Paul never attempts to produce any philosophy of sacrifice. Perhaps the nearest he gets to it is the passage in Philippians in which the cross of Christ is seen as the supreme example of

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Ethics*, iv. 3. It has been said of his *μεγαλόψυχος* or "high-minded man" that he is a philosophic Pharisee, but lacks the one redeeming weakness of the Pharisee that he "loved salutations in the market place."

voluntary surrender of the will to God, however great the humiliation or pain involved.

Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. ii. 5-11).

The epistles of Paul are "occasional pieces" written to deal with particular problems arising out of circumstances as they occurred. The only one that approaches to being a theological treatise is the epistle to the Romans—far the longest and most difficult in the whole collection. This was written in advance to prepare the way for his visit to the church already existing in the capital of the Empire. It is an *apologia* for that attitude towards the Jewish law which had, very naturally, roused the indignation not only of Jews but of Jewish Christians. Accordingly, his teaching in regard to justification by faith is here developed in a systematic form; but no other large doctrine is so treated. His argument, how-

ever, leads him on to relate his teaching on this subject to the conception of God's Plan.

We know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. viii. 28-30).

Texts drawn from Romans form the main foundation on which the Latin logic of Augustine and Calvin erected the doctrine of Predestination. The error of these great thinkers, I venture to suggest, is not that they insist on the doctrine that God has a Plan, but the over-systematic and all-but mechanical way in which they conceive it. Paul's words should be read, not as a theological statement, but as a hymn of thanksgiving.

It is God that justifieth; who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written,

For thy sake we are killed all the day long;  
We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. viii. 33-39).

### THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

The letters of Paul have provided raw material for the theologies of all later writers; but he was in no sense himself a "systematic theologian" The first Christian whom we could possibly so name is the author of the epistle to the Hebrews—and he is first of all a preacher. In his grand exordium he outlines a theology of God's Plan:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And

again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? (Heb. i. 1-5).

He goes on to apply to the interpretation of Christ, and in particular to his death, the allegorical method which Philo of Alexandria had stolen from the Greeks and had applied to certain problems raised by the Old Testament. In effect, he maintains that the sacrificial system prescribed in the Law of Moses was a kind of acted allegory. The Law was "a shadow of the good things to come". The sacrifices of the Jewish Temple were the imperfect, and therefore necessarily frequently repeated, counterpart of the one sacrifice of Christ. But here also, as in the passage of Philippians just quoted, the meaning of this sacrifice is found to lie essentially in the absoluteness of his obedience and self-surrender to the will of God.

For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. . . .

In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou  
hadst no pleasure:

Then said I, Lo, I am come

(In the roll of the book it is written of me)

To do thy will, O God.

Saying above, Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein (the which are offered according



to the law), then hath he said, Lo, I am come to do thy will. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second—(Heb. x. 4-9).

The allegory is magnificently pressed so as to make Christ not only the offering but the sacrificing priest—stressing his fellowship, in temptation and suffering, with common men:

Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. iv. 14-15).

Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation (Heb. v. 7-9).

From the Law and its sacrifices we are led on to the “promises”—the hope and inspiration of that long line of saints and heroes of the Old Testament of whose faith and courage we are heirs:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Heb. xi. 13).

Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. xii. 1-2).

### THE WRITINGS OF JOHN

The Gospel of John (I use the name without begging the question of actual authorship) takes up the problem of the interpretation of Christ at the point where Paul and the author of Hebrews had left off. John too, as we shall see, was a prophet; indeed, for any theory of the nature of inspiration his work is the culminating peak in the development of the New Testament.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not (John i. 1-5).

The language is intentionally chosen to echo, and so to interpret spiritually and metaphysically, the opening of Genesis.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.  
... And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.  
And God saw the light, that it was good (Gen. i. 1, 3-4a).

In some Jewish circles there was a tendency to personify the fiat or word (*Memra*) of God. Greek philosophers had explained the Universe as the expression of a creative indwelling Reason—the immanent thought of God. The Greek “*logos*” can be translated either by “word” or “reason” according to the context; and *Logos* had been used by Philo to correlate the Greek conception of an immanent creative principle with the later Jewish emphasis on the transcendence of God. Thus John’s conception of the *Logos*, or Word, of God is a synthesis of various strands in earlier thought. But he goes on to say something which was entirely new:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth (John i. 14).

The “Word became flesh”, that is, the Divine expressed itself in man. Was it, we ask, a misinterpretation of historic facts, or was it supreme insight into their meaning, that made John write this?

Stephen saw in vision “the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand

of God". That is theology expressed in picture form. The prologue of the Fourth Gospel—carrying a stage further an idea already found in Colossians and Hebrews—gives to the conception behind the picture a philosophical expression. The distinction drawn by John between God and the Word of God is analogous to that which a modern thinker might draw between the transcendence and the immanence of God. It is only of the latter—of the indwelling Divine—that he conceives Christ to be an absolute expression. Nor does his thought entirely isolate the humanity of Christ from that of other men; for to these also, he affirms, there is given through Christ "power to become the sons of God" (John i. 12).

John is quite aware that his interpretation of the person and work of Christ goes beyond anything which the first disciples had apprehended; he believes that it goes further and goes deeper. And the reason why he is convinced that his interpretation is more profound, and therefore more true, is that it has gradually come to inspired prophets like Paul, to the Christian community at large, and to himself, by the operation of that indwelling Divine Spirit which is both the spirit of the risen Christ and of God Himself.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is

come, he shall guide you into all the truth. . . . He shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you (John xvi. 12-14).

The conviction that, in Jesus, God was in man made manifest, is here unhesitatingly ascribed to the illumination of the mind of the community by the Spirit, that is, through a series of "prophets"—like Paul, the author of Hebrews, or himself. The question of the validity of this claim to "inspiration" demands consideration of the same kind, and alongside of the similar claim made by the prophets of the Old Testament.

Behind all John's thinking, making itself felt in every word he writes, is an intense conviction of a spiritual presence. This experience, visualised at Pentecost as tongues of fire, had resulted in the spontaneous formation of a brotherhood, pulsating with overflowing energy, courage, love, joy, peace—interpreted as the indwelling, in group and individual, of a Spirit which was at once that of God and of the risen Christ. In this spiritual return of Christ and his continuous presence as Indwelling Spirit and Comforter, John sees the true fulfilment of the expectation expressed in the earlier Gospels and Epistles of Christ's visible return on the clouds of glory in the Apocalyptic symbol. John must have had some training in Greek philosophy, and like most of us moderns,

he thought naturally in abstract conceptions; the historic Jesus saw with the poet's eye, and the natural expression of his thought was imaginative picture. Imaginative picture and abstract thinking are not identical—nor can either of them ever be the exact counterpart of the concrete living reality which, in alternative modes, they strive to represent. With this proviso, we may affirm that the conception of a spiritual return and of the indwelling Comforter and Teacher as set out by John does not misinterpret the essential thought of Jesus.

We gravely misconceive the purpose of this Gospel if we persist in treating it as biography; it is concerned not so much to recount facts as to suggest an interpretation of them. It should be read as the devotional meditation of a Christian mystic, cast in dramatic form, on the meaning for the believer of that emergence of the Eternal into the sphere of time which is both symbolised and made effectual for man's deliverance in the person of the historic Christ. The author is not only a mystic but a prophet; and the literary model he adopts is a combination of the dialogue form of Plato with the narrative of Mark—with its concentration, from a purely biographical standpoint disproportionate, on the events of Passion week. The long discourses in the Gospel of John

would seem, then, to have a relation to the actual teaching of the Master similar to that of the discourse ascribed to Socrates in the dialogues of Plato. Sometimes, indeed, we seem to get nearer to their inner meaning if we read them with the first person changed into the second—when they become an expression of the devotion of the believer to his Lord—"Thou art the resurrection and the life". Accordingly the value of the Gospel depends not at all on historical details, but on the validity attributable to its interpretation of the meaning of the appearance in history of Jesus.

It is all too easy, at any rate for students of theology like myself, to allow preoccupation with the philosophical and historical questions raised in and by the Fourth Gospel to distract attention from its practical and religious aim—"that believing ye may have life in his name". As a correction it is well to turn to the first epistle by the same author. Here, too, a prophet speaks:

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love (1 John iv. 7-8).

Paul freed Christianity from bondage to the Law; "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life". John loosed it from servitude to Apocalyptic literalism. Yet there are convictions, values,

aspirations which only poetry can voice; inspiration still speaks in the Apocalyptic vision of that other John with whose book the Bible ends.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men. and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God and he shall be my son (Rev. xxi. 1-7).



## V

# LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE

## SYNOPSIS

### THE CONCEPTION OF GOD

Christ's emphasis on the idea of God as Father was a corrective of an over-insistence on the Divine Transcendence by some of the Rabbis.

Pentecost meant to the disciples that God, visualised in the likeness of Jesus Christ, was directly experienced as indwelling spirit. He had, so to speak, come down from heaven and was permanently tabernacled among men.

Possession by the Spirit was a phenomenon capable of objective verification, since it resulted in a revolution in men's lives and a fundamental change of character.

### THE NEW PROPHECY

It was a natural consequence of the changed conception of God that the prophet in the New Testament was a much more familiar and everyday figure than the prophet of the Old Testament.

Examples of the New Prophecy at its best and highest survive in the great passages of the New Testament.

Illustration of this point from the "Hymn to Charity", 1 Cor. xiii.

### DIVINE GUIDANCE

The conviction that the individual can, through the Spirit of God, obtain guidance for everyday affairs is found in the Old Testament as well as in the New.

A possible connection between some cases of guidance and the phenomena known as (a) telepathy, (b) *flair*.

New Testament prophecy is a kind of "half-way house" between the "Thus saith the Lord" of the Old Testament prophet and the experience of guidance by ordinary Christians in all ages of the church.

Guidance and conscience should be considered together as part of the general problem of the intuitional element in ethics.

From the standpoint of validity, no hard and fast line can be drawn between four conceptions, inspiration as seen (a) in the Old Testament prophets and (b) in the language and action of a religious giant like Paul, (c) in guidance, (d) in conscience.

#### TESTS OF GUIDANCE AND OF INSPIRATION

The difficulty of distinguishing between cases of self-deception and genuine guidance. In principle this is the same as that of distinguishing the false prophet from the true, which is dealt with in both the Old and the New Testaments.

The claim of the individual must be tested and judged by the religious community. It should be observed that the selection for a place in the Bible of certain books only out of the sum total of Jewish and early Christian literature is really an instance of this community judgment acting over a long period of years.

Jeremiah suggests three criteria for discriminating between the true prophet and the false.

The Apostle Paul was forced by difficulties in the churches to face a similar problem. His epistles suggest two main tests.

#### THE WAY OF LIFE

Where there is life there is danger; but the danger of rejecting the call of God and so lacking the guidance of His Spirit is greater than that of being occasionally deceived.

But there are four hard conditions that must be fulfilled by all who wish to qualify to be recipients of authentic guidance.

## LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE

## THE CONCEPTION OF GOD

IN an earlier lecture we traced in the Old Testament, mainly through the prophets, a development in the conception of the ethical quality of the Divine. God comes more and more to be thought of as the all-just, the all-merciful, till, in "the Lord is my Shepherd", He is the all-loving. A parallel development can be traced in regard to the intellectual concept of divinity. In the earliest period the Lord Jehovah is thought of, like the gods of other Semitic tribes, as a kind of celestial Rajah of whom "walking in the garden in the cool of the evening" the footfall, on occasion, can be heard. But such anthropomorphism was soon left behind, and the prophets reach a spiritual monotheism; God is "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity".

By the time of Christ, however, the Rabbis, in acute reaction against the anthropomorphism, not only of earlier Hebrew thought, but still more

of contemporary paganism, emphasised the remoteness and transcendence of God in a way which tended to widen unduly the gulf between God and man. Indeed, some of the Rabbis, it has been neatly said, "undeified God in their endeavour to dehumanise Him". Christ's emphasis on the idea of God as Father was corrective of this tendency—evidently a deliberate correction. He brought religion back again to the point of development reached in the 23rd Psalm. Mohammed, reacting against certain contemporary perversions of Christianity, tried to put back the clock and to induce humanity to revert to this later Jewish concept; and there are theologians to-day who would have us outdo Mohammed in that regard.

The New Testament conception of God is a permanent advance on that reached in the Old as a result, not only of the actual teaching of Jesus, but also of two other facts. First, the disciples believed that the gracious Jesus, whom they had known on earth, was now "sitting on the right hand of God", in some sense, that is, sharing God's throne. Secondly, they had personally experienced an inward revolution which began at Pentecost. From that day onwards they felt themselves, both as a community and as individuals, to be possessed by a spiritual power or presence. This they described indifferently as

"the Holy Spirit", as "the spirit of God", as "the spirit of Jesus", or simply as "Christ", in unseen contact with them. God is still thought of as transcendent, as the Creator and the Ruler; but so far as His contact with man is concerned, God is visualised in the likeness of Jesus Christ and is also directly experienced as indwelling Spirit. Thus God has, so to speak, come down from heaven and is permanently tabernacled among men. "For we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them and walk in them" (2 Cor. vi. 16; cf. 1 Cor. vi. 19). Once of old had been seen "the appearance of the glory of the Lord like devouring fire on the top of the mount"; now (cf. John iv. 14) it was a fountain of life and power welling up from within the personality of the disciple.

An appearance, as of tongues of fire, was an accompaniment of this experience on the first occasion. Visions and auditions are psychical phenomena which so frequently accompany intense emotional experience that there is no reason to question the tradition. The "speaking with tongues" which was another accompaniment was (we infer from Paul's remarks in 1 Corinthians xiv.) an ecstatic utterance of unintelligible sounds rather than ordered discourse in a language unknown to the speakers. The vision of tongues of

fire seems not to have been repeated; and the ecstatic speech, though a recurrent phenomenon, was one which gradually died out. The significance of Pentecost does not lie in these spectacular accompaniments; it lies in the fact that (whatever metaphysical or psychological explanation may be given to the event) it marked the welding together of the disciples into a *fellowship* of a quality entirely unprecedented. This quality was explained by the early Christians as being due to their interpenetration by the spirit of Jesus, "The Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. iii. 17).

They use language to describe what has happened to themselves drawn from the then familiar analogy of spirit-possession (*e.g.* Rom. viii. 9-11). Since possession by an evil spirit was the accepted explanation (as still in Africa, China, and India) of certain abhorrent mental and moral phenomena; possession by a good spirit, the spirit of Jesus, was a natural explanation of the contrary phenomena displayed within the fellowship. It is, however, one of the limitations of language that activities of personality can only be expressed in metaphor; and no alternative metaphor has as yet become current to express this kind of apprehension of the Beyond that is Within, as it is experienced at the present day.

And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Cor. ii. 4-5).

Not argument, but fact, says Paul; not persuasion but power from God. It is clear that things happened to people as a result of this experience. The phenomena which accompanied it were (and are) of a character sufficiently conspicuous to admit of verification by an outside observer. So again, writing to the Galatians (iii. 2), Paul speaks as if to "receive the Spirit" was a thing as capable of objective verification as the catching of a disease. It was capable of such verification, for the reason that it normally resulted in a revolution in a man's life and a fundamental change in his character.

If any man is in Christ he is a new creature; the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new (2 Cor. v. 17).

"Ye shall receive power" (Acts i. 8); and the outward evidence of this, "the fruit of the Spirit", is predominantly "love, joy, peace" (Gal. v. 22).

### THE NEW PROPHECY

A feature in the life of this fellowship which demands particular attention is the revival within

it of prophecy—but in an altered form. One consequence of the growing emphasis in later Judaism on the idea of divine transcendence was that misdirected reverence which makes it seem unworthy of God to reveal Himself to the puny men of the present day as He had to the great men of an heroic past. But owing to that bringing down of God from heaven to earth of which I have just spoken, the early Christians, unlike the Jews, found it possible to believe that contemporaries could be vehicles of a divine message. Besides, had not Joel foretold that the age of the Messiah would be marked by a revival of prophecy?—

And it shall be in the last days, saith God,  
I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh:  
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
And your young men shall see visions,  
And your old men shall dream dreams:  
Yea and on my servants and on my handmaidens in  
those days  
Will I pour forth of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.  
(Joel ii. 28-29; quoted Acts ii. 17-15)

Of so frequent occurrence was prophecy in this new form, that, as appears from a remark of Paul (1 Cor. xiv. 29), there might be several persons having this gift present at one time in a local church. Prophecy had been, so to speak, democratised.

The Old Testament prophet spoke in the name



of Jehovah—"Thus saith the Lord"; prophets in the early church gave their message as from the Spirit of the risen Jesus. Probably what the prophet "in the spirit" ordinarily gave was rather like a short inspiring sermon. But with certain individuals, at certain times, this spirit of prophecy issued in utterances of a grander quality. Some of these survive, embodied, in the New Testament—for fineness of insight and sublimity of expression unsurpassed in the world's religious literature.

Let us consider what is perhaps the most famous passage in Paul, the "hymn to Charity" (1 Cor. xiii.), "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels . . ." Paul has been giving the Corinthians sober, sensible advice about the exercise in public of various kinds of "spiritual gifts"; in particular he gives reasons for preferring prophecy, since it has value for edification, to ecstatic and unintelligible "speaking with tongues". This argument, begun in chapter xii., is continued in xiv.; chapter xiii. is an interruption of the main thought.

It is as though the quiet, logical march of the argument was burst apart by a thought so divine and insistent that it could not wait; and that thought was the indispensableness of love in religion. . . . But in reality it was no interruption. Inspiration does not paralyse reason

but intensifies it; it does not tear up the track of true argument, but lifts argument to higher levels. In form this praise of love is an interlude, an intermezzo in *adagio cantabile*; in substance it was the real climax of the whole reasoning. The fundamental Christian consciousness of Paul demanded utterance and everything else had to stand aside. The discussion about the relative value of tongues and prophesying, which was to have been the culmination, becomes a mere corollary after Christ has spoken in Paul. . . . Here we can watch inspiration in the very act and see the spirit of Christ bearing up the flutterings of the human mind with the sweep of mightier wings.<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament is full of passages which we may be sure came originally to the writer in a flash of prophetic inspiration. In some books, Hebrews for example, one may surmise that we have thoughts that came in this way (and perhaps had been written down) at different times which afterwards the author felt guided by the spirit to weld into a single organic whole. We are almost told that the discourses of the Fourth Gospel—or at any rate the substance of them—came to the author in this way:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not

<sup>1</sup> W. Rauschenbusch, *Dare we be Christians?* (Pilgrim Press, Chicago), pp. 10, 20.

speak from himself; but whatsoever things he shall hear, these shall he speak (John xvi. 12-13).

Again the whole content of the Book of Revelation is spoken of by its author as "the words of this prophecy" (Rev. i. 3; xxii. 19). It was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" that visions came like that of the Adoration of the Lamb (Rev. iv.), or of "the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev. xxi.-xxii.). In this book also it is probable that we have, gathered up into a single whole, visions seen by the author himself at various times, and also visions of earlier seers partly re-written in order to bring out the secret meaning as that has come to him.

### DIVINE GUIDANCE

The conviction that the individual can, through the Spirit of God, obtain guidance and direction for the conduct of everyday affairs is another characteristic of primitive Christianity, which is foreshadowed—and more than foreshadowed—in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah (in a passage already quoted) looks forward to the time when right conduct will no longer depend on knowledge of an external law in which the common people need to be instructed,

but on the direct moral and religious experience of the individual:

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord (Jer. xxxi. 33-34).

Similarly there is a passage in Isaiah which looks forward to a time when divine direction in practical affairs will no longer be imparted to the people only through specially qualified prophets, but when God will speak directly by an inward voice to every faithful individual.

And thy teachers shall not be hidden any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it; when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left (Is. xxx. 20-21, R.V. marg.).

A later prophet thus recalls the new "covenant" promised by Jeremiah:

As for me this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord: My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever (Is. lix. 21).

Here again, as so often, an idea first struck out by one of the great Prophets becomes later on to a Psalmist an abiding religious possession:

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which  
thou shalt go:

I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee.

Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no  
understanding:

Whose trappings must be bit and bridle to hold them  
in.

(Ps. xxxii. 8-9.)

It had always been believed that an inward voice, by which divine guidance is given, spoke to exceptional individuals like Abraham or Samuel at turning-points of their career; but here we find the conviction that this guiding voice speaks to any individual who conforms to the pre-condition, set out in a previous verse:

I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity  
have I not hid:

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;  
And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

(Ps. xxxii. 5.)

The thought is repeated elsewhere:

Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning;

For in thee do I trust:

Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk:

For I lift up my soul unto thee.

(Ps. cxliii. 8.)

Nevertheless I am continually with thee:  
Thou hast holden me by my right hand.  
Thou shall guide me with thy counsel,  
And afterward receive me to glory.

(Ps. lxxiii. 23-24.)

In the New Testament the realisation of the Divine as an indwelling Spirit conceived in terms of Christ results in this guidance by an inward voice being taken as a matter of course.

When they lead you to judgement, and deliver you up, be not anxious beforehand what ye shall speak: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost (Mark xiii. 11).

That ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God (Col. i. 9-10).

When Philip sees the Ethiopian in his chariot, the Spirit says to him: "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot" (Acts viii. 29). Paul's journeys are similarly "guided":

And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy

Ghost, went down to Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus (Acts xiii. 2-4).

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden the Holy Ghost to speak the word in Asia; and when they were come over against Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; and the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not (Acts xvi. 6-7).

Paul purposed in the spirit . . . to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome (Acts xix. 21).

Then after the space of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with me. And I went up by revelation (Gal. ii. 1-2a).

Sometimes, as in the case of the visit of Ananias to Paul (Acts ix. 10 ff.), and Cornelius' sending to Peter and Peter's response, divine guidance is given to get into connection with some person who is both absent and unknown. If we knew much more about it than we do, we might call in that curious intercommunication of mind with mind which is called "thought-transference" or "telepathy" as a partial explanation of stories of this kind—whether told of biblical characters or at the present day. But it would be only a partial explanation; for so far as the phenomenon of telepathy has been studied, it appears to operate in an extraordinarily spasmodic and purposeless way. But the laws of Nature and of mind are merely names we give to the ways in which God

normally works; and it is quite likely that one effect on the human mind of trying to live in touch with God is to give direction and purpose (and also enhanced vividness and meaning) to the working of obscure powers like telepathy and thought-transference.

Again, it is possible that certain other cases of guidance should be referred to that instinct for right decision in complex practical issues and difficult circumstances which business men call *flair*—only intensified and given a higher sense of direction by the inspiring effect of conscious contact of the human personality with the divine.

I venture these suggestions because of a notable difference between the points of view of the ancient and the modern world. To the ancients it was natural to suppose that things had occurred in some Golden Age of the past, which could not be expected to happen to contemporaries. We moderns, on the contrary—as a result of the habit of mind engendered by modern science—find it hard to believe that things occurred in past ages unless analogous phenomena are found at the present day. For that reason the problem of what is meant by inspiration in the case of biblical writers cannot for us be entirely separated from the analogous problem of the degree of authority to be attributed to the conviction of



guidance, or to the voice of conscience, at the present day.

That brings me on to a consideration which I regard as of the first importance. The religious and moral experience of the writers of the New Testament is, as it were, "a half-way house" between that of the Old Testament prophets and that of individual Christians in later times. The more we study the New Testament, scientifically, historically, or psychologically, the closer become the analogies between the experience there found and that of certain groups of religious persons who have emerged into prominence at different periods in the history of the Church.

In all ages there have been Christians who, in greater or less degree, have made belief in divine guidance a conspicuous element in their personal religion. In recent years the belief has been strongly reasserted in the religious fellowship known as the Oxford Group.

This belief in guidance must be viewed in relation to the general problem of the intuitional element in ethics. Indeed the distinction between conscience and guidance has been not inaptly stated thus: Conscience tells you the difference between right and wrong; but guidance tells you which you ought to do of two things which are both right.

The idea expressed in the popular description of conscience as "the voice of God" is one which most Englishmen have been brought up to take seriously. Underlying that description is a conviction which in principle is not at a very far remove from the Categorical Imperative of Immanuel Kant—the greatest philosopher since Plato. Wordsworth, in his "Ode to Duty", gives it an alternative expression:

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!  
O Duty! if that name thou love  
Who art a light to guide, a rod  
To check the erring, and reprove;  
Thou who art victory and law  
When empty terrors overawe,  
From vain temptations dost set free  
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity!

There are, then, four conceptions which, though up to a point different, are yet so related to one another that no hard and fast line can be drawn between them. First, there is the "Thus saith the Lord" of the prophets of the Old Testament; secondly, there is the high inspiration which expresses itself alike in the language and in the actions of a religious giant like Paul; thirdly, there is the belief that there is such a thing as divine guidance in everyday life possessed not only by persons like Paul but also by many quite average religious men and women; fourthly, there

is the deep-rooted conviction that somehow or other conscience does speak with an authority which makes it at least intelligible to name it "the voice of God". These four conceptions are different; but they shade off into one another. And they do so in such a way that, if in regard to any one of them we raise the question of its validity, we shall find that we have raised a question which concerns the validity of the other three.

I have already (p. 21) indicated the importance of relating the conceptions of conscience, guidance and inspiration, not only to one another, but to the idea of God's plan. Unless this relation be kept in mind we shall inevitably think of guidance and inspiration, if not also of the operation of conscience, as arbitrary and spasmodic. And unless we believe that God has normal modes by which to make known His plan to men, the conception of divine purpose will become for us religiously and morally sterile; for to obey commands we must be able to hear them.

#### TESTS OF GUIDANCE AND OF INSPIRATION

There are many who shrink from the logic of this conclusion. They fear that, once we assert that ordinary men and women can attain know-

ledge of a supra-rational character or direction from a supra-human Source, we are defenceless against haphazard suggestions from the depths of the sub-conscious, and against the boundless capacity for self-deception inherent in the human heart. It is important, then, to note that already in Old Testament times this question had been raised; already difficulties had arisen from the fact that, alongside of the prophet, there was found also the false prophet. The same problem arose in the primitive Church—in an acute form. Wandering prophets, gnostic and antinomian, were a cause of no small difficulty in the half-century or so which followed the Fall of Jerusalem. Indeed, in all ages, including the present, alongside of individuals whose sense of divine mission or whose sensitiveness to the dictates of conscience makes them pioneers in righteousness, there are found others who, alleging precisely the same grounds for their action or conviction, are manifestly cranks, egoists, or obscurantists—and so bring into disrepute the very names of conscience and religion.

It will be worth while, in considering a problem which was felt as acute in biblical times, to study the lines along which a solution was then sought.

As a preliminary to this it is relevant to stress a fact, which is often overlooked, about the Bible

itself. Neither the Old Testament nor the New represents an average cross-section of the life and experience of the community in which they were produced. Not everything which every religious Israelite or every Christian supposed to have come to him as the voice of God has been accepted as such. The canon of the Old and New Testament is the result of a selective process, continued over many years, which has secured the preservation of what the spiritual discernment of the religious community perceived to be best, and the rejection of what seemed less valuable or even possibly deleterious. That is to say, the Bible itself is a monument of the principle that the validity of individual intuitions must be checked by the conscience and insight of the religious community. Clearly, then, the individual's conviction of guidance or the dictates of his conscience cannot be accepted forthwith as the authentic voice of God without some similar testing and sifting process. The point is one on which the Society of Friends has always laid stress, and it is strongly emphasised by the Oxford Group. In principle it lies behind the practice of Catholic mystics like St. Theresa who submitted her visions to a priest before deciding whether they were sent by God or the devil.

Jeremiah is in constant conflict with persons

who are generally regarded as prophets but whom he denounces as false prophets. His first count against them arises from the low ethical content of their teaching.

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you; they teach you vanity: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. They say continually unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and unto every one that walketh in the stubbornness of his own heart they say, No evil shall come upon you (Jer. xxiii. 16-17).

Thus one criterion of inspiration is found in the moral content of the message given. An easy-going religion is unlikely to be true. The thought is re-emphasised by a later writer.

Thy prophets have seen visions for thee of vanity and foolishness:

And they have not discovered thine iniquity, to bring again thy captivity (Lamentations ii. 14).

A second is the ethical quality of the life of the reputed prophet. Wickedness separates from God; therefore, an evil character cannot be a vehicle of a divine communication.

For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord. Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery places in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall

therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the Lord. And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied by Baal, and caused my people Israel to err. In the prophets of Jerusalem also I have seen an horrible thing; they commit adultery, and walk in lies, and they strengthen the hands of evil-doers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them become unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah (Jer. xxiii. 11-14).

A third criterion is one which cannot be applied by any outside judge; its value is for the prophet himself, to whom the assurance of divine commission gives courage to face the inevitable opposition which his message will arouse. A genuine "word" of the Lord authenticates itself in the mind of the prophet as something different in kind from a fancy or a dream.

The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the straw to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? (Jer. xxiii. 28-29).

The necessity of finding criteria of the genuineness or relative value of "spiritual gifts" was forced upon the consideration of the Apostle Paul by difficulties that had arisen in the church of Corinth. Paul knows that the clarity with which a message from the Divine is received must

vary with the moral quality of the receiver. Nor did he ever suppose that his own contact with the spirit of Christ was of a kind that rendered him infallible. Thus on one occasion, after saying of a particular injunction that it is from the Lord, he proceeds to give another, but this time with the qualification, "Say I, not the Lord" (1 Cor. vii. 12). Again, elsewhere, he remarks:

I have no commandment of the Lord: but I give my judgement, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful (1 Cor. vii. 25).

Yet again, he recognises that the indwelling of the Spirit in the Church as a whole is compatible with the inclusion of a large number of people whom conversion may have set on the right road, but who had not travelled far along it. Nearly every letter of his insists with considerable elaboration on the obligations of ordinary morality and kindness in human relations; these exhortations would not have been given unless among converted persons there were not a few who needed them.

His first test (1 Cor. xii.—xiv.) for deciding the relative value—and therefore in effect also the validity—of spiritual gifts is briefly this: That gift is the highest which most conduces to the common good. Thus prophecy, which gives use-



ful exhortation, is superior to "speaking with tongues", which is unintelligible. But every prophet must be under control:

Let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern. But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence. For ye all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted; and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets; for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace (1 Cor. xiv. 29-33).

Moreover, as we have seen, the whole tenor of this section of the epistle is determined by the dominance of the principle laid down in the Hymn to Charity (ch. xiii.) that among spiritual gifts the primacy belongs to love.

In Paul's treatment of the subject, however, we may detect a second criterion which is not far from being an appeal to reason and common sense. In the first sentence of the passage just quoted, the true *nuance* of the original Greek is more correctly rendered in Moffatt's translation:

Let only two or three prophets speak, while the rest *exercise their judgment* upon what is said.

The action of the Spirit is seen, not in a superseding of reason or of the moral sense, but in an enhancement and intensification of these which enables them to function with greater accuracy

and refinement. Again, allowance is made for the fact that egoism or self-interest may impair the judgment of the individual. Both the right and the duty of the fellowship to exercise its judgment on the claim of any individual to have a word from the Lord is emphasised in an earlier letter:

Never disdain prophetic revelations but test them all, retaining what is good and abstaining from whatsoever is evil (1 Thess. v. 20 ff.; Moffatt's translation).

The same point is made, even more emphatically, in the first epistle of John (1 Jn. iv. 1):

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

And there is a final criterion:

By their fruits ye shall know them (Mt. vii. 16).

### THE WAY OF LIFE

Wherever there is life there is danger; but the danger of rejecting the call of God, and so lacking the guidance of His spirit, is far graver than that of being occasionally self-deceived. Life is action; and we have to choose whether or no we will habitually act with or without that spirit. And it is in action that we find it; only when the ship is in motion does the helm guide. Even self-deception, the last stronghold of the enemy, will

lose its power in proportion as the individual conforms to certain conditions which (in the view of the biblical writers) must be fulfilled to qualify him for the reception of an authentic message from the Divine—whether at the level of the epoch-creating prophet or of the simple person rightly guided on the path of everyday duty.

These are mainly four:

(1) "I would fain be to the Eternal Goodness what his own right hand is to a man." Absolute devotion or surrender of the self to the Divine. "Here am I, send me", says Isaiah; and when Christ addressed to his earliest followers the words, "Follow me", we are told that they left all and followed him.

(2) Self-knowledge, and the consequent admission of failure. The promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye", in the Psalm quoted above, is given to the man who has confessed his iniquity and thereby established a right relationship with God. The first response of Isaiah to the divine call was that flash of self-knowledge which brings home to a man a conviction of unworthiness and sin; "I am a man of unclean lips". So in the primitive Church, an initial confession of sins is assumed as an invariable condition of entrance to it.

(3) "Tarry ye . . . until ye be clothed with power from on high" (Luke xxiv. 49). But this life of

power, a power instinct with love and joy and peace, can only with difficulty be lived continuously except in a fellowship, within which mutual challenge, mutual encouragement, and mutual confession of failure are easy.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God (Col. iii. 16).

Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed (James v. 16).

(4) Entrance into such a life and such a fellowship involves some measure of suffering, sacrifice, or humiliation. "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 27). It is perhaps not an accident that already in the Old Testament the promise, "Thine eyes shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it", is preceded by the words, "and though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction". To Paul, as was pointed out in the last lecture, the distinctive associations of the word "the cross of Christ" would be those of humiliation even more than suffering. The most fundamental difference between the Christian and the Confucian or Stoic is their attitude toward humiliation. The follower of Christ knows that

it is unimportant "to save his face". He must be ready to own up to a moral lapse; though to do this before any fellow human being is acutely humiliating. He must be willing to apologise frankly to a person whom he has injured, and to make restitution for wrong done, though these may be extremely costly to pride or purse. Here a distinction of great importance must be made. Few things are more demoralising than humiliation, loss, or pain, if and when these are inflicted from without and are responded to with resentment; but freely accepted, as the price of following the highest, they become a self-identification with the Cross of Christ. Resurrection follows that crucifixion. That is why Paul speaks of Christians as having been buried with Christ<sup>1</sup> unto death, "that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life" (Rom. vi. 4). The actual result, he means, of this kind of self-identification with the Cross of Christ is liberation from the bondage of inward fears and conflicts and, in face of the world, new hope, new courage, and new power.

"Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way."

<sup>1</sup> Paul adds "through baptism"; the addition obscures his meaning for us, who forget that to him and most early Christians (as to a Brahmin convert to-day) the acceptance of baptism was the actual and literal acceptance of humiliation, loss, and suffering.

Those who have entered in thereby tell us that we may expect another prize—a new conviction that God exists and a new understanding of His will, as well as new strength and happiness in His free service.

If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God (John vii. 17).

The truth of this is a thing which can be tested by experiment; and it can be tested in no other way. It is by getting into water that you prove the practicability of swimming—and its joy.

## VI

# TO THE RESCUE OF REASON

## SYNOPSIS

### THE AGE OF UNREASON

The revolt from reason is one of the disquieting features of the present time.

This seeks to justify itself by an appeal to modern psychology.

### RELIGION AS LIBERATION

Religion, once regarded as the enemy of Reason and Liberty, may now be summoned to their rescue; for Religion can overcome the ego-centricity of man.

The extent to which unconscious desires can distort the findings of reason is not great in the field of pure science; but it is determinant in political and other questions where personal interests and emotions are involved.

Contrary views are held as to the bearing of the psychology of the individual on his acceptance or rejection of religion.

Psychotherapeutic treatment and Religion.

The psychology of confession.

### PSYCHOLOGY IN RELIGION

The effects of mass suggestion.

Why is much sincerely held Christianity so relatively barren of result?

To master the subconscious depths of the self, Religion must learn from the methods of psychology.

### THE WISDOM OF GOD

The right functioning of Reason depends on something beyond itself.

The practical results of looking to a higher wisdom.

## VI

# TO THE RESCUE OF REASON

## AN AGE OF UNREASON

THE eighteenth century thought of itself as the age of Reason, the last half of the nineteenth as the age of Reasonableness. The present is coming near to being the age of Unreason.

Everywhere in the modern world reason is in process of being dethroned. Unless this process is arrested there is small hope for the future of civilisation. But how is it to be arrested? To this question some may reply that mankind will be reconverted to belief in reason by the disastrous consequences that will result from abandoning it. That contention would have sounded plausible twenty years ago; but nothing is more obvious at the present day than the fact that, taken in the mass, the human race does not learn the lessons of experience. Everyone, at the end of the last war, supposed that humanity had received a lesson which would not need to be repeated. No reader of the newspapers needs to be reminded that the



lesson has not been learnt; that the belief still flourishes that war is a glorious parade and a means to the achievement of both moral and material good. From small disasters individuals and even nations may learn. The result of disasters on the scale of a world war is merely further to incapacitate the race for sane thought and sane action; and also to weaken further the basis of accepted moral values on which alone a healthy reconstruction of political and economic life is possible.

The modern revolt from reason attempts to justify itself by an appeal to the findings of psychology. Cynics have always averred that the mass of mankind is swayed not by reason but by passion, and that the reasons which they allege are commonly not more than excuses. There is a saying of Frederick the Great, "I take what I want; I can always find some pedant to write a book giving legal or historical grounds for justifying my action". Modern psychology has gone further; it has made even the intellectuals distrust the power of reason by shewing how often the conduct of human beings is explained by complexes, phobias, and other founts of motive, the existence of which lies below the surface of the individual's consciousness. What we call our "reasons" for believing this or doing that can

frequently be shewn to be not the result of objective thinking, but "rationalisations" of subconscious or unconscious desires.

### RELIGION AS LIBERATION

There was a time when the champions of the freedom of thought, without which the pretence of reasoning is a futile sham, had to fight against religion—or rather against champions of religion who confused its essence with traditional views of history or theological definition. To-day bad times are ahead for Reason and for Liberty—unless, indeed, they can summon Religion to the rescue.

Religion can overcome the ego-centricity of man—by inviting him to become the willing instrument of an Eternal Purpose, and then by giving him the insight and the power to be this. So long as a man's hopes, desires, and fears are primarily ego-centric, it is impossible for him to take an objective view, not merely of the comparative rightness of different lines of conduct, but even of their practicability. For the capacity of weighing evidence and estimating probabilities is conditioned by the degree to which a man has achieved the disinterestedness which at least desires to see things as an impartial intelligence would view them. The first condition of the at-

tainment of knowledge is a disinterested passion for truth. But what is truth, except the power to see things as an undistorted and all-informed intelligence would see them? And that means as God sees them. The ego-centric man is necessarily purblind.

No doubt, the extent to which the influence of desire can distort the findings of the intellect varies considerably with the material with which at any given time the intellect is attempting to deal. It is unimportant in a science like chemistry, where everything can be weighed and measured. Though even here it has happened that personal antipathy (whether conscious or unconscious) to a rival expert has delayed the acceptance by a particular professor of the truth of some new discovery; but, when the evidence is reasonably cogent, it will do no more than delay his acceptance. But in all international, political, and social questions, and indeed wherever personal interests or emotions are involved, the bondage of the intellect to desire is obvious. And psychology has shewn that unconscious desires can be more misleading than conscious—for even a person who in all sincerity wishes to be impartial may be ensnared by these.

This last point is of special importance when we are dealing with the problems—on their intellectual side far more difficult—which are

raised by ethics, metaphysics, or theology. It is essential here to stop to ask the question, How far is the intellect of the person who writes, lectures, or argues shackled by some subconscious or unconscious desire?

I was once told by an eminent psychotherapist that a patient who expresses violently atheistic or anti-clerical opinions is usually found to be suffering from the psycho-neurotic condition technically known as a "father-complex". The patient has projected a subconscious dislike of, and revolt from, his father, either upon the conception of God or upon clerics as His representatives. Not, of course, that every patient who is anti-religious suffers from some kind of complex; but this is nearly always the case whenever he or she is bitterly anti-religious. Stalin, I am told, is the son of a priest. I think, too, of a well-known English writer who is at his wittiest when he sees a chance of getting in a hit at religion or the clergy—some of whom, it must be admitted, do lay themselves open to his darts. I am informed that, as a small boy, he was most strictly brought up by a pious aunt of stern views. He is still—or rather parts of him are still—the clever boy delighting to shock a pious aunt.

Freud and others regard religion as the projection of the subconscious desires or fears of the

individual or the race. I should readily concur that many types of religion are explicable in this way—including certain perversions of, or perverted emphases in, historic Christianity. But though psychology can explain (whether in regard to religion or other matters) certain errors of the reasoning process by finding causes why people sometimes think wrongly, it cannot explain—or explain away—the fact that they sometimes think correctly. Freud himself—in reference to a study of his own on the bearing of psycho-analysis on a certain picture by Leonardo da Vinci—says significantly:

It must be admitted that it throws no light upon the two problems which probably interest [the layman] the most. It can do nothing towards elucidating the nature of the artistic gift, nor can it explain the means by which the artist works—artistic technique.<sup>1</sup>

Unless, therefore, it can be shewn that no form of religion whatever can be either reasonable or true, the fact that some people—for reasons that are psychologically explicable—misconceive the nature of God no more disproves His existence than the fact that some people have a neurotic dread of mice proves that these are exceptionally formidable creatures.

<sup>1</sup> S. Freud, *An Autobiographical Study*, translated by J. Strachey. (Hogarth Press, 1935.)

The lesson of psychology is that reason cannot function rightly in certain fields until and unless it is liberated from, and only to the extent that it is liberated from, narcissism,<sup>1</sup> sex obsession, phobias, resentments, the inferiority complex, and the like. In many cases one or other of these states is pathological to such an acute degree that long and skilful psychotherapeutic treatment is required of a kind that only a trained practitioner should attempt. In such a case a successful cure may depend on a re-education of the patient which will provide him or her with a new synthesis of the character and a new focus for the direction of his life. Here religion could come to the help of psychology; but very often the physician cannot, consistently with his own mental integrity, call in its assistance. Hence, not infrequently, the psychotherapist finds that he has cast out one demon only to leave the house swept and garnished for the reception of others later on. Freud himself, though convinced that religion is an illusion, is wistfully apprehensive as to how the human race is going to get along without it. A famous pupil of Freud's once said to me that he (the pupil) had from his own

<sup>1</sup> Narcissus in Greek legend was a beautiful youth who pined away with love for his own reflection in a pool; hence this technical term for a neurotic self-centredness and self-love.

medical practice come to the conclusion that the human race requires for psychological health either religion or some adequate substitute for religion which has not yet dawned on the intellectual horizon.

Psychologists maintain that, not only persons obviously neurasthenic, but all of us (in lesser and various degrees) are hampered—in personal relations, in judging of risks, in the economy of vital energy and other ways—by some psychological traumas, phobias, guilt-complexes, or narcissistic ego-centredness. They tell us also that a necessary preliminary to cure is a frank confession of these—often an extremely painful and humiliating process. Still more do inward conflicts due to conscious wrong-doing, unconfessed and undressed, pervert the judgment and make healthy peace of mind impossible. Sins, even more than phobias, require to be confessed.

I am not speaking here of confession as a means of obtaining absolution from a priest; that is a matter in regard to which differences of opinion are hot. I am saying that for mental health it is necessary that confession should be made, not merely before God, but also in some human ear. A guilty conscience, haunting fears, obsessive lusts, ego-centric idiosyncrasies, preclude the regular and normal functioning of ordinary common sense in

everyday practical life, as well as the maintenance of harmonious personal relations. The intellect requires to be liberated from the bondage of guilt, fear, and pride before it can do its work properly in regard to the things of daily life.

Religion can effect this liberation. That is why Reason, I have urged, and also the Liberty which is only possible in a society where the majority are able to behave as reasonable beings, are to-day in grave peril unless they can summon Religion to the rescue. To each one of us the offer of that liberation is made—but on God's terms, not on ours. And for no two individuals are those terms exactly the same.

### PSYCHOLOGY IN RELIGION

The great majority of the human race do not require a long course of psychotherapeutic treatment, nor, if they did, would it be practicable to supply it. But no individual, in actual fact, does develop to maturity without having in his psychological make-up a certain amount of narcissism, sex repression, phobia, etc.; and it is from the pooled results of these elements in the psychology of the individual (intensified by mass suggestion), quite as much as from economic conditions, that the bitterness of international or inter-class hostility arises.



It has long been known that the effect of a crowd is to bring into operation predominantly the lower and more primitive instincts which are common to all men. Mass suggestion also results in an inhibition of the critical faculties, which, having been developed late in the history of the race, are less universal. The modern state, through control of education, the press, and the radio, is enabled to multiply indefinitely conditions which make for mass suggestion. The use that is made of this control largely depends on the individual psychology of the persons or classes who exercise it. But these persons are in their turn limited, for better or for worse, by the individual psychology of the majority of citizens. In the last resort, then, the battle for "the salvaging of civilisation" must be fought out on the plane of the psychology of the individual man and woman.

Clearly, any individual who has completely surrendered his will to God will have got rid of ego-centric narcissism; one who has inwardly appropriated the teaching of Christ about anxiety for the morrow will have got rid of fear obsessions; one who has assimilated other aspects of the teaching of Christ will cease to be obsessed by sex or resentment; and so on. It will be objected that a large number of Christians have tried

this, but the success of their endeavour—so far as can be judged by outward actions—has not been great. This barrenness of result, I would suggest, is mainly due to the fact that the subconscious depths of the personality have not been reached.

No man, through his fully conscious self, can do more than surrender what he knows of himself to what he knows of God. Unless he recognises this limitation he will make little progress in that growing knowledge both of self and of God that will consistently issue in the kind of action which is the real test of a changed life. For such progress there is needed the constant practice of times of quiet listening to God and obedience to what we are convinced is His command; and it is all but essential for the individual to have some Christian friend or friends with whom he or she can from time to time talk over difficulties, failures, lapses, and discouragements. In this way, as will be obvious to any student of psychology, the subconscious also will be reached, and will gradually be re-orientated. The practice of a "quiet time", supplemented by talks with a discreet and sympathetic friend, is specially useful in the case of an instinct like sex, which, wrongly handled, may be the root of faults of character of a type which Christ condemned more than those

of the publican and the harlot. If Christianity is to save our threatened civilisation, its representatives must deflect their interest from theological discussion and denominational rivalries to a practical dealing with those basic infirmities of human nature which are the tap-root of all human ills; and it must do so in a way which, whether consciously psychological or not, is likely to be psychologically effective.

### THE WISDOM OF GOD

The right functioning of Reason depends on something which, though not contrary to reason, is beyond it. It depends upon the attainment of a higher wisdom—the wisdom that comes with, and from, a religious apprehension of the divine personality.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart;  
And lean not unto thine own understanding:  
In all thy ways acknowledge him,  
And he shall direct thy paths. (Prov. iii. 5-6.)

In certain matters, for example in regard to a piece of scientific research, such a wisdom is likely to manifest itself mainly as an enhancement of the individual's natural insight and intelligence. In the affairs of everyday life we should expect it to operate in this way, but also in another. Besides

a further growth in "common sense", a clearer perception of the probable relations of action and consequence, we should expect also to find a different estimate of the comparative worthwhileness of things. In certain ways it might profoundly modify a man's valuations, and therefore his aims. He might come to think some things futile which he once thought important, and *vice versa*, and if a man's thoughts as to what is most worth while are coming nearer to those of Christ, he will sometimes act in ways which surprise his friends. But the results he will achieve thereby will often surprise them more.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

SUPPLEMENTARY LECTURE

CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

*"As certain also of your own poets have said"*

(Acts xvii. 28)

SUPPLEMENTARY LECTURE  
CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

SYNOPSIS

PRIMITIVE RELIGION

PHILOSOPHERS AND PROPHETS

ZOROASTER

MOSES, CHRIST, AND MOHAMMED

HINDUISM

BUDDHISM

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRISTIANITY

## CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

### PRIMITIVE RELIGION

THE advance of civilisation involves not merely "division of labour" in things material, but still more conspicuously a progressive differentiation of mental activities. In primitive society activities which we regard as distinct, and call by separate names—Science, Art, Politics, Philosophy, Religion—exist in only a very elementary form; and what, for our present purpose, is more important, it is an *undifferentiated form*. Among savages, so far as science, art, and politics exist at all, they exist commingled with one another; thinking is picture-thinking, and therefore science is largely, and philosophy entirely, expressed in terms of myth. This whole undifferentiated complex exists in a mental atmosphere and is associated with customs and beliefs which may be regarded alternatively as magical or religious. Thus at this stage of development religion is a phenomenon which cannot be isolated any more than can science, art, or politics. It follows that at this stage it is a phenomenon which cannot be

studied in its pure form. That is why there are a hundred and fifteen definitions of religion—none of them entirely incorrect.

The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* occupies twelve quarto volumes of over 900 pages, printed two columns to the page; each of the articles in this Encyclopaedia is of the nature of a précis, a compact summary of a considerable literature. The field to be surveyed is immense, and in matters of detail full of endless complications. If, then, I essay to present a “bird’s-eye view” of it in a single lecture, I must insist that from the nature of the case this can only be done by selecting a few outstanding features in a way which must result in an over-simplification of an indefinitely intricate pattern. But where circumstances are such that it is impossible “to see the wood for the trees”, over-simplification is not only justifiable but necessary, provided it is presented not as “the conclusion of the whole matter” but merely as a first step towards reasonable comprehension.

If we read a book like Frazer’s *Golden Bough* we seem to see set out, almost in pageant form, the annals of the Reign of Superstition. There is much that is merely picturesque, there is more that is cruel, bestial, or hamperingly trivial. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*. Yet there is another side to the question, which has been



brilliantly argued by Dr. R. R. Marett.<sup>1</sup> Primitive man lived in an environment which was rarely not threatening, and every stage in his conquest of it demanded desperate adventure; and, says Dr. Marett, "I take the stimulation of hope to be the chief function of religion in all its phases".

For a signal example of sheer pluck, consider ancestral man, that ambiguous figure looming on the utmost verge of the prehistoric horizon. It is usually held that, unlike the apes, he came of a line that had somehow avoided all specialisation, and in this way, namely as the Jack-of-all-trades of the animal kingdom, became committed to a career of unparalleled adventure. A hand that can be turned to any job and an intelligence no less well hinged—such are the hereditary instruments of general utility that have enabled his descendants to accommodate themselves to all climates, and to render fire, earth, water, and air, alike subservient to their whim. The emotional equipment needful for this primeval gentleman of fortune was the pioneer temper. He must hope for the best even while preparing for the worst. A certain Micawberism is essential to the man of enterprise. He must be cheerful beyond strict reason—beyond a cold or even lukewarm estimate of the opposing hazards. For any hazard is an uncertain quantity, being halved by heroism, doubled by doubt. From the start, then, man must have been brave with a bravery inclining towards bravado.

Dr. Marett goes on to urge that the importance of religion for primitive man is to be sought

<sup>1</sup> *Faith, Hope and Charity in Primitive Religion*. (Clarendon Press, 1932.)

mainly in the psychological effect of ritual observances, not in the sphere of theoretical belief; and that the emotional result of participation in these observances, horrible though some of them are, is yet on the side of hope rather than fear. *On the whole* the effect on primitive man of religious observance, for all its triviality, barbarity, and superstition, is and was a fortification of the spirit of adventure, of courage in the face of unknown danger, and of that social solidarity which is a pre-condition of the development of what we call morality.

Primitive Religion is generally regarded as falling within the field of Anthropology. The study known as Comparative Religion, though it often overlaps with Anthropology, has concentrated attention more on what are commonly known as the Higher Religions. These are relatively few in number; and, in spite of the fact that a large proportion of their professed adherents retain a mass of primitive superstition, they are notable for their stress on philosophical or ethical considerations and for exhibiting the phenomenon religion in a way which makes it easier to distinguish it from magic. Of these Higher Religions, some are conspicuous for their emphasis on ethics, others for their interest in metaphysics, others for their stress on the mystical side of religion.

## PHILOSOPHERS AND PROPHETS

That insistence on an indissoluble connection between religion and ethics, which to a Jew or a Christian seems axiomatic, is a relatively rare achievement. True, most religions teach that the gods will punish persons who commit breaches of the tribal moral code; but they also insist that they punish, both more certainly and more severely, breaches of irrational taboos or acts of disrespect (even unintentional) to themselves. And it is usually held that the gods, like the rulers and judges known to their worshippers, readily condone wrong-doing on receipt of adequate bribes—in the form of sacrifices. Again, though the gods may punish breaches of the moral law, they are not expected to observe it themselves. As Xenophanes pointed out in the sixth century B.C., Greek legend consistently ascribes to the gods actions of the kind which, when committed by men, are universally regarded as disgraceful; and the Indian legends of the gods are, if anything, more open to this criticism than the Greek.

For this reason, the first great advance of humanity took the form of a protest against the superstitions and worse of traditional religion. I have already pointed out how, over the larger

part of the world, this protest was voiced by teachers who were primarily philosophers; it was made, therefore, in the name of morality and common sense. Confucius in China, the Buddha in India, and in the Greek world Xenophanes and other early rationalists, were practically contemporary; all flourished between 550 B.C. and 500 B.C. Confucianism, though it has something of the quality of a religion in China and Japan, began as a system of ethics; indeed it has been disputed among experts whether or no Confucius himself believed in the existence of a Divine Being. The beginnings of Greek philosophy were even more negative; but later on, mainly through Plato and the Stoics, it became constructive; and in the works of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius (which fall within the Christian era) Stoicism had developed into a religion—in spirit not at all unlike Confucianism. Similarly, the founder of Buddhism was primarily a philosopher. He may have believed in the bare existence of gods; but he continually insisted on the futility of prayer or sacrifice; the gods should be totally ignored as being powerless to help the race of men to solve what is its real problem. That problem is to escape from the misery inevitable in life as such, a misery intensified by the Indian belief in the wheel of

Karma with the endless series of reincarnations which this implies. The one remedy is a knowledge and a discipline which, if not in this yet in some future reincarnation, will enable the individual gradually to kill within himself the very will to live and thus achieve Nirvana, the Eternal Peace. Later on Buddhism developed into a religion, which, along with Christianity and Mohammedanism, forms one of the three "world religions", that is, religions which have overstepped all boundaries of race and appeal to man as man. But Buddhism became a religion partly by deifying its founder, partly by inventing a series of new divine beings (*bodhisattvas*), and partly by adopting deities from the older religions of the countries across which it spread.

But in Persia and in Palestine the protest against the immoralities of traditional religion was voiced at a much earlier date and in a totally different way. It was made not by philosophers, but by prophets. That is to say, the protest was made by persons who criticised the existing religion on the ground that it was a parody and falsification of the essential nature of religion itself.

The prophet and philosopher attack the problem by methods which stand in sharp contrast to one another. Confucius and the Buddha look first

on man; they teach an ethic or way of life (or rather, two very different ethics and ways of life) based on their view of man's human needs and functions. The prophets begin at the other end; they assert the ethical character of the Divine and the consequent obligation of man to live a life in accordance with the divine will.

### ZOROASTER

For the life and personality of Zarathustra, or Zoroaster as he is commonly named, the prophet of ancient Persia, historical evidence is scanty; even his date is undetermined, though it must have been before 600 B.C. It is certain that a great deal of what is found in later Zoroastrianism—of which one form is still professed by the Parsees of India—does not go back to the founder himself; and a good deal in it would probably have been regarded by him as akin to the religious corruptions which he was called upon to destroy. But this is a phenomenon to which parallels may also be found in the religions which claim Christ and the Buddha as their founders. Zoroaster undoubtedly taught the existence of a supreme spiritual power of good; he inculcated a high morality for the servants of this good God. Later Zoroastrianism elaborated the idea of a supreme

spiritual power of evil, *Ahriman*—conceived of as constantly at war with the good god, *Ormuzd*, but destined to be completely vanquished at the end of the present world-order. The doctrine that in the meantime an almost even balance is maintained between the forces of *Ormuzd* and *Ahriman* is thought not to go back to the teaching of the founder; but even the later Zoroastrianism looks to the ultimate victory of good, so that this religion still affirms that in the last resort the Universe is on the side of righteousness—in other words, that God is intrinsically good.

#### MOSES, CHRIST, AND MOHAMMED

Far more is known about the early development of Hebrew religion. As we have seen above, exact dates can often be assigned to the activities of the series of Prophets whose utterances are collected in the Bible. It is thus beyond dispute that the campaign against the unworthy elements in popular religion, and the affirmation of the essential righteousness of God made by Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, is earlier by nearly two centuries than the protest against superstition voiced by Confucius, the Buddha, and the Greek philosophers.

The religion which owes its characteristic

feature to the teaching of the Prophets of the Old Testament is of unique historical importance, not only for its own sake, but still more because it became the parent of Christianity and Mohammedanism; that is, of two out of the three world-religions. Christianity was immediately and directly an offshoot from Judaism. Six centuries later Mohammed made a new supranational religion out of certain leading ideas in the nationalistic religion of the Old Testament—especially its stress on the unity and transcendence of God and its abhorrence of idolatry. He was influenced also by the Christianity of his time. Mohammed taught his followers to regard Abraham, Moses, and Christ as the greatest of his predecessors; these, he held, had taught the same doctrine as himself, but, the record of it having been corrupted by Jews and Christians, it required to be revealed anew.

This new and final revelation is preserved in the Koran (or Qur'an), which consists of the prophecies of Mohammed. These were collected soon after his death (*cf.* p. 115), and are arranged, not in chronological order, but (like the Epistles of Paul in the New Testament), roughly speaking, in the order of their relative length. The whole book is regarded in the strictest sense as verbally inspired. Mohammedans date their era from the



flight of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622.

## HINDUISM

Hinduism is not so much a religion as a culture. That is to say, the complex of ideas and usages covered by the term Hinduism is more nearly comparable to that covered by the term "Hellenism" than to what is meant by the names Christianity or Mohammedanism. It is marked by an extremely rigid social system of which caste is the central feature—each caste having certain religious observations peculiar to itself. It has a large number of deities, great and small, with whose names are connected an infinitely luxuriant crop of legend and of cultus—sometimes widely prevalent, sometimes merely or mainly local. A striking feature is the early date at which philosophical speculation entered the religious outlook of the more intelligent devotees. The doctrine of *karma* and reincarnation, though philosophical in origin, is sufficiently capable of being presented in a popular form to have been appropriated by the masses of the people. Probably also the great majority of Hindus accept in a vague way the philosophical pantheism which has dominated the thought of all but a small minority of Hindu religious writers; and even the philosophical

concept of *maya*, which affirms that the world of sense is illusion, has to some extent percolated into the popular consciousness.

Hindu pantheism is more thorough-going than its analogues in the West. It pushes the doctrine that all things are an expression of the divine to its logical conclusion; it does not shrink from the admission that good and evil are *equally* expressions of the divine, and that therefore it is philosophically inadmissible to affirm that God is good.

I quote from the Bhagavad-Gita, reckoned by Hindus to be the choicest gem in their collection of sacred writings and the highest expression of the fine flower of their religion:

... All this universe is strung upon Me, as rows of gems upon a thread.

I am the taste in water, O son of Kunti; I am the light in moon and sun, and *Om* in all the Vedas, sound in the ether, manhood in men.

The pure scent in earth am I, and the light in fire; the life in all born beings am I, and the mortification of them that mortify the flesh.

Again:

Of the guileful I am the dice-play, of the splendid the splendour; I am victory, I am resolution, I am the Goodness of those possessed by the Goodness-Mood.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by permission, from translation in Dent's *Temple Classics*, pp. 119 and 134.

In India, Mohammedanism and Hinduism exist side by side; here, therefore, deism and pantheism—which emphasise respectively the concepts of divine transcendence and divine immanence—stand face to face with one another, not as philosophical theories of the study but as competing race religions. To the Hindu God is *in* all, to the Mohammedan *over* all. I recollect an eloquent address by an Indian Christian who prophesied that Christianity must one day become the religion of a united India just because it teaches that God is both immanent and transcendent. A religion that thinks of God as *in all* and also as *beyond all* is a synthesis between the two great systems which for centuries have divided India into hostile camps.

There is, however, a minority strain in Hindu philosophy which has a more theistic conception of God, of which Ramanuja is the leading exponent. This is related to a type of religious devotion technically known as *bhakti*. *Bhakti* is a form of religious devotion which expresses itself as joyful adoration of, and dependence on, some highly personalised divine being—usually a divine being who at times has made himself apparent to his worshippers in human form. The hymns of the *bhakti* poets—most frequently addressed either to Siva or to Krishna—are

among the most interesting products of Indian religion.

## BUDDHISM

The relation of Buddhism to Hinduism is comparable to the relation of Christianity to Judaism. Buddhism and Christianity are the two religions which have been most dependent for their inspiration on the gracious personality of historic founders—in some ways so like, in others so remote from one another.

Christ was a carpenter, the Buddha was a prince; they experienced life from different angles. The Buddha was a philosopher; Jesus had the mind of a poet. They thought and spoke in different modes. Each for the sake of miserable humanity made the supreme sacrifice—the Christ in submitting to death, the Buddha by consenting to live.

The barrier which separates the Buddha from Christ is due, in the last resort, more to the intellectual theories which he inherited [Absolutism, *karma*, *maya*, and the pessimism these engender] than to disagreement in the findings of his own very original moral insight. Where the Buddha was most himself, there he was most like Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Of the actual life of Siddhattha Gotama, the Buddha—best known in the East by the name Sakyamuni (= Lion of the clan of Sakya)—very

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my *The Buddha and the Christ*, pp. 43 and 71.

little is known. And there is much dispute about the scope and context of his original teaching—the more so as he wrote nothing himself and the earliest Buddhist writings are some centuries later than his time. It is clear, however, that Buddhism began as a protest against the futility of the ascetic practices and sacrificial rites of contemporary Hinduism, and (to a less extent) against its preoccupation with philosophical theory. It spread rapidly and for some centuries had a very large number of adherents in India. Later on it lost ground, partly from internal degeneration, partly owing to steady and skilful opposition from the Brahmin caste, which succeeded in doing for Buddhism what the Emperor Julian failed to do for Christianity—vanquish it by assimilating certain of its features. Buddhism has virtually disappeared from India itself; in Ceylon and Burma it is still the dominant religion, but in a form a long way removed from the teaching of its founder.

For Buddhism, however, greater triumphs were in store, along another line of development—that known as Mahayana in contradistinction to the Hinayana of Ceylon and Burma. The characteristic elements in Mahayana Buddhism seem to have been developed within or beyond the northern frontiers of India about the beginning

of the Christian era. This form of Buddhism came to China and spread thence to Japan, where it reached the climax of its development, and is divided into numerous sects. In Mahayana Buddhism the figure of the historical founder has become of less importance than those of a series of beings known as *bodhisattvas*, who are either different personifications of the principle of Buddhahood or are what may be called "buddhifications" of older local deities. Of these, the most important are *Amida* (Amitabha), and the Goddess of Mercy, *Kwannon* (in China, *Kwan-yin*), "the Madonna of the East".

Amida Buddha is one of the high creations of religious mythology. Aeons ago in some universe long since passed away, a certain monk, through long and weary discipline, after many incarnations, had won the power and right to enter Nirvana. Instead he vowed never so to do until—enduring through the aeons rebirth after rebirth, and persevering in self-discipline and meditation—he had laid by such a treasure of "merit" that it would make up their lack to all who could never by their own effort have achieved release from the Wheel of Things. All such need do is to call upon his name in sincerity and faith; these at death will be caught away by Amida to his "Western Paradise", a land of everlasting bliss, from which

there is no return to the cruel necessity of everlastingly reiterated rebirth.

In this doctrine of salvation by faith alone, the first Jesuit missionaries to Japan saw a double of the "Lutheran heresy" of justification by faith. And there are scholars who think it may have been caught up into Buddhism from Christianity—possibly from the Nestorian Mission which entered China in A.D. 635. The majority, however, incline to regard it rather as a development from the *bhakti* strain in Indian religion. For our present purpose the question of origin may be left open; but it is worth while to note the main points of contrast and resemblance between Hindu *bhakti*, Amida Buddhism, and the teaching of Paul. All find the way of deliverance in passionate devotion to a Divine Redeemer. They differ in the comparative stress which they lay on misery or on sin as the thing from which deliverance is most to be desired. Another difference, and one which matters more, lies in the characters, as visualised by their respective devotees, of the Beloved Redeemer; for by the character ascribed to the object of devotion will be ultimately moulded the character of the devotee himself. Judged by this test, the self-sacrifice of Amida raises him high above Siva, intermittently the terrible and the bounteous,

or Krishna, the divine mentor of the Gita but also the Don Juan of the gods. Yet for all his calm compassion, a mythical Amida is not the peer of an historic Christ.

### THE CENTRALITY OF CHRISTIANITY

It appears, then, that Christianity occupies a uniquely central position in that it presents in itself a *synthesis* of the finer elements in the other Higher Religions. This central position is the result not of a compromise but of a creative synthesis and harmonisation of the outstanding excellences in the other religions. Intellectually, its conception of God is a theism which is a synthesis of the deism of the Mohammedan and the pantheism of the Hindu. Ethically, it stands midway between the "world-denying" asceticism of Buddhism and the "this-worldly" self-realisation of Confucius. Emotionally, it fuses the disciplined restraint of Stoicism with the fervour of the Indian *bhakti*. Moreover, it is the religion which has reflected most profoundly on the problem of evil<sup>1</sup>—neither burking it (as does Hinduism) by consigning the world of fact to the realm

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the specifically Christian attitude to evil, I may be allowed to refer to the relevant essays in my books *Reality* and *The Buddha and the Christ*.



of illusion, nor deifying it (like the Zoroastrians and the Manichees) by making it part of the essential structure of Reality. Thus it unifies and brings to a climax developments and tendencies which elsewhere only partially achieve maturity. Finally, it is unique in the fact that the character of its historic founder, as portrayed in the Gospels, is such that the belief cannot be dismissed as religiously unworthy that He is at once the Ideal Man and the "portrait" in time of the Invisible and Eternal.

If a committee of students of Comparative Religion were to sit down to compile a synthetic system, carefully choosing the highest elements from each of the great religions, they might produce something rather like Christianity. But that was not the way it came to men. It was prepared for by a series of prophets, each giving forth a message which had come to him as "a word of the Lord" that he was charged to deliver. In the climax it was flashed upon the world in an epoch of vision—the Christ, the new life in the Spirit, the interpretation of these by apostles and evangelists. The synthetic unity we have noted is not that of a well-drawn committee report; it is that of a work of art.

A further point may be illustrated by a story told of Yuan-Shih Kai, the first President of the

Chinese Republic. The President sent for a certain missionary to enquire what might be the doctrines which he was endeavouring to impart to the students of China. After an interview lasting two hours, he summed up the matter:

There appears to me no great difference between the teaching of Confucius and that of Christ in regard to what constitutes right conduct; the difference lies in the fact that, according to your account, Christ does not merely teach men what to do, he gives them power to do it.

This "power to do it" derives from what a psychologist might describe as "a turning of the *libido* outwards"—a re-orientating of the personality involving a change in the foundation motive from pride to love.

The Sermon on the Mount may be read as Christ's commentary on the two commandments, Love God, Love thy neighbour. As interpreted by him these might be restated: "Be done with fear, for God is your father: be done with hate, for His sons are your brothers". But he sees two attitudes as limiting conditions to God's acceptance of men as his sons. One is the soul-shrivelling egoism of a continual grievance, or of the obsession of revenge, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses". The second is what I may call the "ethical narcissism" of the self-consciously virtuous man who prides himself that he is "not as other men" and "despises others". The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is Christ's rendering of the injunction,

Walk humbly with thy God. Modern psychology is here on the side of Christ. Most of us are self-deceivers as well as sinners. Salvation dawns when we begin to find ourselves out. That is the difference between the Christian and the Buddhist; each has seen through a fraud—but to the Buddhist the fraud is the Universe, to the Christian it is himself.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity, then, must be regarded as being, so to speak, *the type form* of religion. That is why an investigator into the nature of religion is bound to give special attention to an examination of this form. This is not merely legitimate; it would be unscientific to do otherwise. Religion, in its historic manifestations, may be likened to a broad river draining a marshy plain. There is not only a main stream, along which great ships may safely navigate; there are many smaller channels, some broad and shallow, some narrow and winding; there are stagnant pools; and the surrounding earth is saturated with water. If, in the parable, water stands for essential religion, it is to be found even in the mud of primitive superstition—though water squeezed out of mud is likely to be evil-smelling and polluted. The pools and by-channels correspond to the various religions of a more advanced type; Christianity will be represented by the main stream.

<sup>1</sup> I have ventured to quote this paragraph from my *The Buddha and the Christ*, pp. 163-164. (Macmillan, 1932.)

But even the main stream may carry along mud or decaying vegetation (varying in amount at different times and places) that has come in from smaller runnels or from the earthy banks through which it flows. If pure water is what we seek, some filtering will be required. And to find it wholly fresh and sweet, we must go back to the lofty hills in which the river has its source.

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live.

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